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ABSTRACT

The three reports combined here examine the process consultancy approach to faculty development initiated by the Tavistock Institute on Human Relations (TIHR), its use by the British Open University, and reactions from university staff. The first report reviews the original Tavistock report of August 1979 as well as reactions to the ideas and experiences brought by the Tavistock consultants to England's Open University. The next report presents archival material from the transcript of the 'Preliminary Tavistock Report' by two TIHR consultants and now placed within the historical context of events at the Open University over the subsequent 13 years. Finally, the third report describes interviews of 26 Open University staff members concerning their opinions about the preliminary report from TIHR consultants. Substantial notes from the interviews are included plus four written contributions from Open University staff. (GLR)

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Reflections on the Tavistock report thirteen years on

Report No 66

The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations Consultancy in the Open University

Report No 75

Open University staff reactions to the Tavistock report

Report No 76

Teaching and Consultancy Centre

by Robert Nicodemus

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The Open University

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Report No 66

Reflections on the Tavistock report thirteen years on

by Robert Nicodemus

1992

Institute of Educational Technology
The Open University, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA

The Open University

The Teaching and Consultancy Centre is part of the Open University's Institute of Educational Technology.

Its aims are:

1. To help improve student learning in the University by advising and assisting Faculties, Schools, Continuing Education, University Committees and groups, as appropriate. A chief concern is the accessibility and teaching effectiveness of course materials, to which the Centre contributes through its work on course teams: through research; course planning, policy making and working methods; critical reading of draft materials, and the evaluation of courses.

2. To maintain a knowledge base for the above activities by helping to research problems in the OU learning system and by recording experience in course teams and on committees, and also to encourage innovatory solutions and practices.

3. To provide consultancy and training, inside the OU and on a contract basis with outside organisations, based on the staff's wide experience in distance education and open learning. On this same basis, to chair course teams and write course materials, and to 'transform' materials produced by external contributors into high quality distance teaching material.

FOREWORD

The original Tavistock report of August 1979 is included here along with an introduction to the ideas and experiences the consultants brought to the OU.

REFLECTIONS ON THE TAVISTOCK REPORT THIRTEEN YEARS ON

Introduction

In May 1978 IET (Institute of Educational Technology) agreed a contract with Gordon Lawrence from the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (TIHR) to interview OU staff about their experiences of working in and with course teams. The contract also allowed time for observing twenty meetings of a course team, to include negotiation about taking up a 'process' consultancy role in the team - a role which has become particularly associated with TIHR since the 1940s. Over the following eight months to January, Gordon and two colleagues interviewed fifty-two staff, 75% were academics based in Faculties and 25% were from other divisions (Regional Academic Services, Administration, Operations, Project Control, Personnel, Library and the nurse). Irene Young joined the course team of T232 'Engineering Mechanics: Solids' which was due for first presentation in February 1980. Since first presentation was only a year away at the end of her observation, the team would have begun 'hand-over' of prepared course materials to Operations for production (editing, design, printing). The important stage of discussing first and second drafts of correspondence text was completed before she joined the team. T232 was last presented in 1989.

Who was interviewed and what was observed did have some consequences for the consultants and influenced the final report they produced ('The Open University' TIHR Doc. No. 2T-271, August 1979) which is included in the Appendix here. Lacking experience of early stages in course preparation and other group situations, particularly summer schools, it was difficult for the consultants to see where the anxieties staff talked about were contained and worked through and how this process contributed to individual learning, team development, creativity of courses and the system which supports their presentation. In our own follow-up interviews (discussed in TCC report No 76 'Open University staff reactions to the Tavistock report') OU staff extended the list of concerns which the consultants focused on in their initial verbal report op February 1979 (discussed in TCC report No 75 'The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations consultancy in the Open University' and in the final (August) written report included here.

Now, thirteen years after the Tavistock report, it is time to review what we were told, how the consultants got their impressions, what the reactions were, what we have done since then and what implications all of this has for the future i.e. implications for further enquiries, for changes in the distance teaching system (if any) and for staff development activities.

New paradigms

Given all our courses in the social sciences, education and management, what could consultants from outside tell us that we did not already know? First, the Tavi consultants gave us an experience of being students, not unlike that which many of our own students may have at a distance. As a result, OU staff have a better understanding of and empathy for the experiences many students may have. Such understanding might influence the structure of courses and the distance teaching system although this would be difficult to prove.

The Tavi consultants brought a perspective to the OU which is not well known and rarely practiced in higher education. The perspective derives from the application of psychoanalytic theory and methods to the study of groups and institutions. An important aspect of the methodology is to offer an alternative model of 'authority', one which functions to 'contain' the anxieties stirred up by learning and change rather than give advice on what and how to think. In the OU's distance teaching system we try to provide both kinds of authority (technological and human) - through particular techniques within correspondence texts, multi-media technologies (e.g. TV, computers) and a complex system which includes human beings to help students learn (part-time tutors) and cope with the system (senior counsellors).

In addition to being presented with a relatively simple but hard to understand psychodynamic model of learning and change, we found that the ambivalent feelings stirred up by the report were expressed in a polarization (first reported in the staff newspaper Open House - November, 1979) between staff who rejected the report and those who found something of value. Soon after, many misrepresentations of the report were provided in the national press and this experience was probably responsible for preventing any further contracts with the consultants at the time. Fortunately, within a year were were able to continue further enquiries ourselves because of the interest the Tavistock report had stirred up for a number of staff.

Through these experiences some of us were having a living experience of some of the ideas introduced by the consultants, especially 'depressing' feelings about the (temporary) conflicts the report awakened. We are all familiar with behaviour such as flight/flight which is evidence of dis-integration in relationships but less familiar are the consequences of re-integration of opposing or ambivalent feelings. In psychodynamic theory, integration is accompanied by anxieties about destructiveness 'within' (i.e. a 'depressive' position) and it is only through one's belief in a capacity for reparation that creativity is possible. The consultants were concerned about their lack of evidence for 'spaces' in which anxieties were contained and worked through. One consequence of resolving anxieties is a better contact between inner and outer reality at all levels of work and this must include adaptability of the institution to socio-economic changes outside.

The consultants chose to present a very old paradigm to represent the conflict between technological and human values. Technological values are associated with regularity, continuity and predictability. To represent technological values in opposition with more human values - clarity, rationality and control might be contrasted with emergence, emotions and spontaneity. I am trying to keep in mind here some fundamental aspects of experience (space, time and relationships) to facilitate comparison of behaviour at different levels of organization - individual, team and between groups. When relationships are denied there are particular consequences associated with the three categories just introduced i.e. 1. When separation and differences are denied, boundaries in space (what is inside/outside) become confused along with personal identity and roles, 2. when time is denied (no beginnings, middle or endings) there is no sense of progress, of achievement or memory of the difficulties worked through together, 3. when uncertainty and the unknowable cannot be faced, change will be prevented.

What we have found out

Although these ideas are rather abstract, we now have many examples of group behaviour through enquiries in the OU over the past thirteen years - particularly with course teams or there individual members and with staff and students in summer schools. Although the latter have been very controversial, the important fact is that enquires in summer schools were done and resulted in some unique data which help in understanding the impact of a distance education environment on work and learning. Details of these and other studies are in a series of thirteen TCC reports listed at the end of this report.

Less controversial has been the work with course teams, partly because it was easier to get everyone's agreement but also because the experience was contained within one group in contrast to trying to confront and work through anxieties at the inter-group levels i.e. between separate teams in summer schools or divisions (centre/periphery).

There are two aspects of work in a course team, one is getting on with the reasonable business of makings decisions, writing drafts and commenting on them and the other is providing a place to contain anxieties and work them through. As anxieties are modified through the available relationships, they become more realistic and the team more integrated internally and with systems externally. The idea of what a team is, who it includes and what it is committed to, develops in a progressive way which, on the surface may seem very disorganized because individuals are used to represent anxieties about becoming inter-dependent (both inside a team and with the environment outside). We depend on the success of our students and acceptance of peers and yet can only imagine this since it is two years beyond hand-over of materials and even more when we are at the most difficult stages of writing and commenting. As the consultants suggested, the process is at considerable cost to some individuals but this may be reduced where they are helped to see the process, what all the confusion and conflict is about and how individual personalities are exploited.

One colleague commented about my emphasis on the behaviour of 'personalities', especially in the TCC reports. The main point is that personalities are not usually the cause of problems, as some are prone to judge. Problems provide evidence of anxieties being articulated and resolved along with learning and development. As one course chair speculated years ago, the team's problems seem to be related to something outside or beyond the team and, consequently, more difficult to solve within the team.

Thus, teams provide a model for 'containment' of anxieties and to the extent that they successively negotiate their way through the 'depressive' position, they are also able to be creative in their work. This model also applies to other teams in the OU, especially those in summer schools which provide a container for the OU, especially those in summer schools which provide a container for student's anxieties and facilitate their development as independent learners. Most of the working through of depressive anxieties is unconscious and not easily seen, the evidence is usually more easily located within one's own feelings. This invisible transfer of feelings between staff also works at a distance (one might say, is accentuated by distance) between staff and students - both ways. In these terms, the OU can be seen as an organic 'whole' where the integration of systems is due as much or more to unconscious processes.

In summary, what the Tavi consultants brought us was a model for understanding the link between individual learning and institutional development. Central to this model is the idea of an alternating process between dis-integration and re-integration (splitting, projection and introjection) evidenced by persecutory and depressive anxieties. These processes are evidence of defenses which may be expressed in groups in terms of unquestioning dependency on some 'safe' authority or fight/flight with or from authority. Failure to cope with depressive anxieties may lead to these behaviours or a third possibility of pairing in which the creative potential is blocked and change is not allowed.

This discussion is only a brief introduction to the report and further details are available in the series of reports and monographs listed at the end.

Attention of the media

Publicity about the report started with the November issue of the staff newspaper Open House - headlined on the front page as "Shock Report on 'despair' of the OU staff". A two page centre spread gave an edited version of the Tavistock report and detailed comments by seven academic staff e.g. The OU "has hit up against academic's strong sense of individualistic competition, and the tradition of critical attack upon others work. This makes team-work, within a managerial framework which is supportive rather than itself being destructive, very difficult, if not impossible. The beginnings of a situation comes from recognizing the problem and its causes. The TIHR document begins to do this, but without sufficient sensitivity to the academic world..." (Bob Bocock, Lecturer in Sociology - now Senior Lecturer).

"Writing for learners-at-a-distance involves creating a model, a mythical person who you think will epitomize a student... Certainly, many of our early conflicts might be ascribed to the team not sharing the same model, and it could be that, where the Report points out the changing image of the OU student, they have put their finger on something of considerable importance..." (John Mason, Lecturer in Mathematics - now Professor).

"It is unfortunate that the many valid and important observations contained in the Report are undermined by blanket statements about despair and disillusionment. The supportive/non-supportive nature of the course team environment is an issue which merits special attention and study. If that question would now be opened up for discussion, then the Report would have served its purpose, almost, I am tempted to say, in spite of itself." (Michael Gurevitch, Senior Lecturer in Sociology - levt the OU).

"I can't see this particular Report of any genuine help in either defining or solving these problems, and - to be frank - I find it impossible to take it very seriously... 'Psycho-analytical' language is no more useful in such a situation than the language of 'management'" (Arnold Kettle, Professor of Literature - deceased).

"The document does have some insights, as when pointing to disappointments among faded ideals and eroded radicalism; but these are hardly original. Nor need we search for their causes in obscure recesses of the unconscious." (Ken Richardson, Lecturer in Psychology - now Senior Lecturer).

"I have come across some rather dismissive attitudes to this document. Difficult as I find the jargon, I would not wish to join in the general condemnation. The document contains too many real insights"
(David Gallon, Deputy Regional Director, London).

I was also given an opportunity to comment in Open House on twenty five interviews we had conducted. I wrote that they mostly "validate the hypotheses suggested by the three Tavistock consultants although usually with some constructive criticism. More important is the surprise that personal experiences which are felt to be uniquely unhappy are found more broadly in course teams and in other groups in the OU... we are treating the report as a working paper which challenges, us to reconstruct a more representative picture of how group learn and fail to work together..."

Further difficulties were to follow treatment by the popular press, evidently picked up from the Open House article. e.g. "Why don's ideals turn to despair" Evening Standard (26.11.79). The article included the following statement which had nothing to do with the report "the university has found itself catering for career-obsessed students anxious to get a better job". "Open University dreams turns into a nightmare"- "according to a psycho-analytic probe into the unconscious minds of the university's teaching staff" Education (23.11.79), "OU course teams accused of causing depression" Times Higher Education Supplement (30.11.79). Two months later the student newspaper Sesame commented on the report - "Normally the OU contemplates its own navel. For a change, recently, it asked someone else to do it...Cynics will not be surprised that the Tavistock mob found plenty of fluff and gunge in the OU's collective belly button. Their main observation was that the OU's method of producing courses as a team effort, with each member's work subjected to public criticism and comment from colleagues, may lead to stress and self-doubt among the individuals involved. (All together now: Aaah!)" (Jan/Feb 1980).

As the man seen as responsible for the controversial report, I only wished I could view the experience with humour at the time. I will not go into further details here except to say that a year latter a request from a course team (who associated me with the report) for help on relationships initiated further enquires from a process consultancy perspective that are still continuing and now being extended into training activities.

Only 60% of the staff interviewed by the Tavi consultants are still at the OU. I will be inviting them through this report to comment on how they see changes in the OU over the past thirteen years and implications of the Tavi report for future developments.

Prophesy

In 1992 the Open University is on the edge of unprecedented changes - expansion into Europe and further, validating the degrees of other academic institutions by taking over the role of CNAA (Council for National Academic Awards), and responding to other developments directly linked to individual work e.g. the

UFC (Universities Funding Council) Research Assessment Exercise, work assessment and career counselling.

Computers and information technology have open up many possibilities including distance educations and assessment of student learning through large scale surveys.
The large scale emphasis on measuring quantities is provoking some cynicism e.g. work assessment will not make any difference, counting the number of articles published has nothing to do with quantity, important aspects of learning cannot be described through the use of questionnaire.

Is there a danger in neglecting individuals within such large scale changes? Will individuals feel that any one cares about what they really do, especially those with institutional management responsibilities who may come under increasing pressure to cope with implementing the many changes?

It is likely that an increasing number of colleagues will be working under temporary contracts. Will they feel that their OU experience is valued and put into some perspective about their long term careers? Or will some of them feel that, in the terminology of the Tavi consultants, they are being used as objects or mere 'instruments' to help achieve some institutional aims? Do they feel that there is some less materialistic (perhaps more spiritual) aspect to the institution which is concerned with quality and ideals about what is 'good'?

Quality is often asserted in the literature of institutions but how much do we understand the relation between individual work (where creativity originates) and the kind of environment which helps people manage themselves rather than being managed - another concern of the Tavi consultants.

To what extent have the Tavi consultants been prophetic about the impact of technological values, one of which is to cause people to erect barriers around themselves as a protection against punitive working conditions?

Recently there was considerable criticism of a long term OU 'Strategic Plan' for not quoting aims from our original charter. To the extent that we may lose touch with our beginnings and early aims, this could be evidence of a fragmentation of boundaries (and disorientation) and failure to contain anxieties associated with change (and understanding of the group processes involved). Without a clear sense of beginnings and endings, how can individuals possibly acquire any sense of self worth about their work?

Thirteen years ago the Tavi consultants told us that colleagues were increasingly going outside to find or sustain their sense of self worth. Perhaps we need to now look at a larger dimension of change in which creativity is sustained when individuals have to separate from the institution, alone or in small groups, to work through their own learning in relation to all the changes - including the pressures of an increasing 'mechanized' work environment where only strict and hierarchic procedures can keep order. Institutions have been described has having a kind of 'immune' response to innovators, rejecting them to preserve internal stability. Perhaps we should look at the kinds of discussions going on in these small groups and bring them into a more public sphere for debate. To get any depth out of such an effort we will need to look at group relations and some of us will have to be prepared to become the objects of intense ambivalent feelings, rather like the Tavi consultants showed us. Otherwise we may pair up simply to prevent change. The 'third' perspective of a participant-observer might help us observe some of the rules of play, in psychodynamic terms.

Relevant reports

TCC reports 1992

No. 59 The demand for consultancy on group processes in the Open University

No. 60 The Tavistock Observation course: implications for distance education

No. 61 Process consultancy within the Open University: 1981 - 1991

No. 62 Understanding course teams: organization and dynamics

No. 63 Workshops and seminars on team work: 1978 - 1991.

No. 64 A psycho-analytic perspective on learning through OU videos

No. 65 Development of a course team.

No. 66 Reflections on the Tavistock Report thirteen years on.

No. 67 Summer schools: individual and institutional learning.

No. 68 A consultancy in summer schools

No. 69 Group relations training and consultancy

No. 75 The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations consultancy in the Open University.

No. 76 Open University staff reactions to the Tavistock report.

Appendix

TIHR DOCUMENT NO. 2T-271

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

W. Gordon Lawrence
Irene Young

August 1979

The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations
120 Belsize Lane
LONDON NW3 5BA

INTRODUCTION

We have been asked to make this a short report. This Working Note is merely a written record, an aide memoire, of the salient working hypotheses that emerged from the Open University project. The main work has been carried out through interviews and subsequent discussions, particularly the public one on 22nd February, 1979, and the smaller one before with some members of the steering group for the project. And, of course, we would still see ourselves as available for any further exploration.

The whole project can be seen as a joint exploration of what is understood to be the "reality" of the Open University (OU). The idea of exploration has been the organizing metaphor of the project. It started from an initiative of Dr. Robert Nicodemus who spoke to Gordon Lawrence of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (TIHR) of the possibility of a joint venture between the OU and TIHR. As a result of a number of discussions with some of the staff of the Institute of Educational Technology (IET), it was decided that there be an enquiry into the functioning of Course Teams (CT). It was also said at that time that it would be inadvisable to "split-off" Course Teams from the larger context of the OU. So it was agreed that there should be a series of interviews with people in the OU whose experiences were germane to the study. Also being explored, though less directly, was the institutional role of IET.

Since the project began in April, 1978, Irene Young was able to work with one CT over a period and in the order of 50 interviews were conducted by her, Gordon Lawrence and Professor Len Levine of McMaster University, Canada, who was a Visiting Social Scientist at TIHR in the summer of 1978. What we say about Course Teams is only partly based on Irene Young's experience. This Note sees the completion of the project which has included the discussions to which reference has been made.

One point we want to make is that Irene Young attended a CT until such times as it was possible to move into an accepted consultant role. We felt that in this way it would be possible for one of us to be having similar experiences to a member of IET.

At the end of this project we want to acknowledge the commitment of Dr. Robert Nicodemus who had a difficult role being at the interface of the OU and TIHR. But for his careful coordination, interviews and meetings could not have been arranged. His work in managing the interface should not be lost.

As is by now well enough known we use a psychoanalytic perspective. The problem is that people then assume that we are exclusively interested in the psychopathology of individuals and, even worse, that we want to make people into patients. We hope, however, that we have shown that what we are interested in is the workings of the unconscious within the political frame of institutions.

COURSE TEAMS

Course Teams (CT) can be seen as the dominant throughput systems of the OU. Through the CTs knowledge and insights are transformed into educational programmes and material for students to work through. Without this throughput of knowledge, the OU would have nothing to transact with its environment. It can be postulated that all other systems in the OU are designed to enable members of CTs to pursue this goal. It is the CT and its unique products which differentiate the OU from any other university. Part of the institutional identity of the OU is linked to the CT which purveys "distance learning".

The shared experience which people report of CTs is their disappointment. People have often come to the OU because they believed it was an exciting place to be. The promise of the OU and a CT is of being able to make knowledge with others. The evidence is that the products of CTs are very often innovative, stimulating and exciting. But as the project proceeded and as we conducted more interviews we began to wonder at the magnitude of the cost to individuals who were engaged in making these courses.

What seems to happen in CTs, as we piece the evidence together, is that they start with promise. People, on the whole, are enthusiastic. Then there develops a destructive environment which by the end of the life of the CT has become a punitive one. Course material is produced but usually by a very small residue of the origin CT.

This may be a crude sketch but it contains the elements of the story of a CT.

As a result people turn to a new CT, hope that it will be different, but end up with the same experience. The difference is that they are better able to protect themselves from its destructive aspects.

As we understand the situation: people tell us that the most threatening aspect of a CT is the criticism that has to be taken and what seems clear is that it is felt to be an attack on the person and not just about competency.

To try and get a large group of people to work together is always difficult because the larger the group the more the participants are influenced by unconscious social processes. The way round this is to divide the group into sub-groups and to leave the coordination to a chairman. But as soon as this is done the participants feel that they no longer have any responsibility and authority for what ensues. The answer is not to do away with structure but to evolve an appropriate structure for people to feel that they are being supported in their work.

Our working hypothesis is that the pattern of existing management of CTs appears to be unable to provide a "container" for dependency or anxiety. There are feelings reported of distress, of lack of appropriate structure, and of support. One function of "management" would be to provide conditions for others to manage themselves in their roles as they pursue the collective task of the CT. Among these conditions would be the resource of, say, an environment that allowed for anxieties and disquiet about work to be explored without individuals feeling that they were incompetent. This would be an example of "containment".

What is difficult to express or expect in the OU is the ability to be dependent on others. This is reflected in the CTs' functioning. The public myth is that academics should be independent. So it is difficult to be dependent on other people to learn. To further bolster the myth of independence people have to attack others' work. When this kind of action is taken we can see what could be called "pseudo-independence" being exercised .

Fundamentally, we are suggesting that many people in the OU, to preserve themselves and their sense of autonomy, have to act as if they were totally independent. (The reasons we give in the subsequent section of the Note.) This is evident in the way that CTs seem to find it difficult to delegate responsibility and authority amongst themselves for work to be carried out. Consequently, members of CTs take away work from a CT, such as writing, and have to struggle away at home as private individuals fully aware of the way their work is to be received by their colleagues. The work is "split-off" not delegated and thus enhances the feeling of fragmentation that people experience.

The punitive nature of life in a CT is also apparent from the way in which the time boundary is perceived and used. The time when material is to be finally produced comes to be experienced as a punishing event as opposed to a time of fruition or a boundary that is attained to mark a life-span. And, of course, through lateness in supplying material for instance, people ensure that it does become punitive which is an obvious self-fulfilling prophecy. External pressures are created which cause internal stress for individuals. Consequently, the memory of a CT is a bad one and sometimes so bad that the memory has to be repressed in the unconscious. Other people, of course, will have different experiences.

Because the OU deals in distance learning and because it uses a sophisticated technology, there is an emphasis on rationality and instrumentality in relations. The unconscious cannot be acknowledged in the context of work. The fact that people learn from and through their unconscious has to be denied. This means, as we see it, that people find it difficult to learn from their uncomfortable experiences of CTs. Certainly it is difficult to maintain courses by revising them once they have been broadcast for a few years. Our hunch is that this is because people know that to do that would be to re-awaken painful memories. So people turn always to the new course which somehow, even magically, will be a different experience from the past.

CTs are, however, a mirroring of the larger OU. There is, we hypothesise, a process of projection and introjection taking place between the individual and the CT, the CT and the OU, and the OU and IET. By this we mean that individuals in order to preserve themselves as good objects in their own eyes have to deposit their own perceived bad aspects in the structure (i.e., projection). Then they find that they have to reincorporate this (introjection), but this is too painful so it becomes split-off further. Hence, there is nothing good to take in from anywhere so people have to build a higher wall around themselves to ensure that what good they believe they have will be preserved from erosion.

SOME PSYCHIC AND POLITICAL PHENOMENA

Our central hypothesis is that one of the keys to understanding life in the OU is to recognize the underlying despair that people feel in the OU. At times, despair may be regarded as frustration but our evidence suggests that the former term is more accurate.

The despair can be explained away in terms of people recognizing that educational institutions are being pruned and so career aspirations have to be trimmed. A variation on this theme would be the idea that as people grow older in any institution, which they have joined earlier in their career, they will experience some kind of mid-life crisis. By this is meant that people come to question what their working life has been about, where their creativity and promise may be, and how they are to face the seemingly longish years till retirement.

This, however, is too simplistic an explanation and safely pushes the issues into individuals without considering the social milieu that people collectively make.

The matter, we believe, is more complex. We start from the notion that the OU was established to fulfil an idealised vision of making higher education available to a wider range of people than had ever been envisaged. Essentially, it was designed to bring education to all who might think they had some potential. Although the OU has flourished it has been, as we understand it, with students who were consolidating their careers, e.g., the certificated teacher taking a degree and with students who are giving themselves a second chance. Essentially, however, the courses are for people who want to make a career of some kind.

The radicalism on which the OU was posited inevitably has become eroded over time.

The point is that collectively the staff of the OU have not been able to share such disillusionment about the failed ideals of the OU. This means that it is less possible to create a new shared vision which would be more in touch with realities as the clientele present them but would also have an element of "acting back" on the environment. There is, therefore, a sense of "running down" which is acted out through people competing for scarce resources. The competition which has a sense of crisis about it allows people to displace their feelings about the underlying despair.

The connection between despair and the unspoken disillusionment is made through people feeling depressed. Here we want to make a distinction between individual depression which is an experience all human beings have and an experience that we call "social depression". By this is meant people become depressed in their role in relation to the social system. Then what happens, we think, is that the social depression is defended against, iust as the despair and disillusionment are avoided. People do this as a way of defending their sense of themselves as autonomous individuals.

One way this is done is through withdrawal. Because the OU has staff located away from its campus, it is not always possible to work out whether the withdrawal is simply physical or psychic. (This rather implies that people ought to live on campus but this would be nonsensical.) The psychic withdrawal, we are suggesting, is masked by the physical withdrawal. The withdrawal is concerned with getting to the point where one does not want to make relationships except of a very limited, instrumental nature.

But people have to come together in the OU for administrative decision-making and for CTs. It is at this point in time that unconscious processes begin to take over. Our argument is a complex one. We have said that social depression, though felt, is not always publicly acknowledged. When people come together there will be some people who have a personal predisposition or valency for depression and they will be used, quite unconsciously, by others in whom they can "dump" their unacknowledged depression.

Depression, we know, is a capacity that creative people hold to a greater extent than others. Hence they are readily available as receptacles for others' depression. This, of course, incapacitates them to a greater degree and impedes their creativity.

Turning all this on its head, so to speak, we are suggesting that all that we have been writing about should be seen as a public issue and not hidden away or disguised as a private trouble. This might make it possible for people to build mutually dependent relationships which would enhance everyone's creativity.

There is a further complicating factor. The OU has no students in the conventional sense. This means that there are not people present in the role of learner. Therefore, it is difficult for staff to make themselves a role since all the accepted rituals have been stripped away. One anxiety in the OU is that people be placed in the dependent role of student. So no one can learn from anyone else unless they happen to belong to a strong friendship group that can contain this kind of anxiety. Clearly, this affects creativity.

All this means that individuals in roles in the OU have to keep very tight boundaries around themselves to protect their inner worlds from the bombardment they believe, and some know, they can receive from other people. To have to live in such a withdrawn fashion must affect the ability to be cooperative and to engage in conflict without being destructive. Hence, creativity is further diminished.

It took us some time to understand the underlying metaphor which patterns the OU and its functioning. Our working hypothesis is that the OU is apparently organized around the technological metaphor. This could be called the "industrial" or "fantasy" metaphor. We have found that the control systems established by the OU have their roots in technology. This is understandable given that the OU communicates with its clientele mainly through the mass media.

While people may support these control systems on one plane, on another plane they protest as human beings who are capable of thought and who recognize that human life is posited on fictions and myths. (People know that critical path analysis is an invention of man to order the sequences of reality as he wishes it to be. It is a fiction. But such fictions come to be seen as reality.)

If we were to continue to work with you we would be searching for what we have called an "ontological metaphor". All we mean by this is that we would be joining in a quest with you to make a different metaphor which engaged with being and doing. Such a metaphor would, hopefully, engage with the issues being addressed in this Note.

In our previous discussions we talked about the use of space - meaning space "in the head" as opposed to physical space. If we can understand that two people relating create a Third Dimension between them - the other Two Dimensions being themselves as individuals - we can see that this is the space of cultural experience. Similarly, between an individual and the institution there is a cultural space. This is the space of play or creativity. Our hypothesis is that this potential space in the life of the OU has become eroded for the reasons that we have given.

All in all, we are saying that people in the OU collectively create a hampering environment rather than a facilitating one, even though they would wish it to be otherwise. This means that the future life of the OU is put into jeopardy because people cannot grow - and if they do it is outside the OU - and this must affect the quality of work that is produced and, in turn, students.

Politically this means, as we see it from our role perspective, that people in the OU create a culture of harassment or what could be called coercive compliance. The paradox is that the more this is done the more people want freedom (even if they have to withdraw to get it), and the more they act out their wish for freedom the more structures of control have to be built in. All in all, we are saying that the environment hampers people managing themselves in their roles and, at times, we were quite amazed at the simplistic models of management which were being employed but not enjoyed. Essentially, this was an implicit hierarchic model, i.e., one supervises another. Explicitly, however, it "looked" different in that people seemed to be free. But these are mutually collusive processes between the individual and the institution.

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Our working hypothesis is that IET has to be made impotent by other systems in the OU. If IET was potent others would have to question not just how they are functioning but why. This is not to suggest that IET should have absolute possession of "truth" (that would be omnipotence), but rather that they could initiate exploration and questioning. Because IET have probes in different parts of the OU environment they could piece together evidence for working hypotheses about the "social state" of the OU.

To some extent impotency is wished for within IET because within it there are people who act as internal saboteurs and consequently ensure that IET will not have a collective voice on occasions and "speak" to the OU about what the OU is doing in contemporary society. Some IET members have got their intellectual, technical and psychic niches and merely want to perseverate in them. Others want to do otherwise.

For this last mentioned set of people it could be possible to establish a further relationship between them and TIHR. Without outlining any programme of work, we would suggest that if people are interested they might get together and explore what it means to be a member of IET and see where it takes them in terms of forging a collective role in the OU as opposed to providing the privatised bits of "consultancy" which seem to be the norm.

The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations Consultancy in the Open University

by Robert Nicodemus

1991

Institute of Educational Technology
The Open University, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA

The **Teaching and Consultancy Centre** is part of the Open University's Institute of Educational Technology.

Its aims are:

1. **To help improve student learning** in the University by advising and assisting Faculties, Schools, Continuing Education, University Committees and groups, as appropriate. A chief concern is the accessibility and teaching effectiveness of course materials, to which the Centre contributes through its work on course teams: through research; course planning, policy making and working methods; critical reading of draft materials, and the evaluation of courses.

2. To maintain a knowledge base for the above activities by helping to research problems in the OU learning system and by recording experience in course teams and on committees, and also to encourage innovatory solutions and practices.

3. To provide consultancy and training, inside the OU and on a contract basis with outside organisations, based on the staff's wide experience in distance education and open learning. On this same basis, to chair course teams and write course materials, and to 'transform' materials produced by external contributors into high quality distance teaching material.

FOREWORD

Important archive material made available in this report is the transcript of the 'Preliminary Tavistock report' by two TIHR consultants and now placed in the historical context of events in the OU over the subsequent thirteen years.

THE TAVISTOCK INSTITUTE OF HUMAN RELATIONS CONSULTANCY IN THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Introduction

Enquires by OU staff over the past thirteen years have greatly extended our understanding of dynamics within and between groups and the importance of these processes, particularly in distance education. After briefly summarizing what we now know about the relation between structure and process in learning, I will review what the Tavistock consultants were able to tell us thirteen years ago about a distance education environment, how it affects relationships and the consequence for creative work and learning. In the Appendix is included the transcript of the 'preliminary Tavistock report' presented on 22 February, 1979. Six months later the consultants produced a short 10 page written report ('The Open University' TIHR Doc. 2T-271) and it was distributed to staff who had been interviewed (about 51) as well as colleagues who requested the report. The report and reactions to it are considered further in TCC report No 66 'Reflections on the Tavistock Report thirteen years on' and TCC report No 76 ' Open University staff reactions to the Tavistock Report'.

The context of distance education

Most of our enquiries have been through 'process consultancy' in which a 'participant-observer' explores ideas with a team about the sources of anxiety affecting work - particularly anxieties about relationships 'at a distance' or at an unconscious level of experience. This 'action-research' role also provokes anxieties which may be focused on the consultancy, especially at the inter-group or institutional level (between groups). Although our enquiries have sometimes been very controversial, the important fact is that they have been done and the data produced constitute a unique contribution to the literature of learning and change in individuals, groups and institutions. The enquiries have functioned in the OU as a form of 'container' for anxieties which has enabled learning as well as reflection on the kind of training we might undertake to improve learning at a distance within distance education institutions.

There are four geographically distinct parts of the OU - the centre in Milton Keyes (usually referred to as 'Walton Hall') where most full-time staff are based, the thirteen regional centres whose staff organize two hundred and eighty UK study centres where (optional) tutorials are offered by over five thousand part-time tutors and the residential schools which are a required part of sixty-five different courses. In these locations are three essential and interdependent activities which contribute to the effectiveness of student learning at a distance - (a) course team work (b) regional work and (c) residential school activity. This system of interdependent relationships can exist because anxieties about work and learning are contained and resolved through the structures - team, regional centres and residential schools - and personal relationships which are used, in part, as a substitute for the lack of contact, especially between full-time staff and students. The three integrated OU systems, which are only a small part of the total, in turn facilitate the integration of different capabilities within the distant students who mostly work from home. This facilitation occurs at a number of levels, from the practical to the unconscious. Values and culture of the institution are communicated simply by the way things are done but overt awareness of many values is largely unconscious. Activities in study centres do not appear to be important in the dynamic process because they largely serve a remedial function.

It is when the integration of systems break down that we may see the deleterious consequences for learning. With dis-integration, structure loses its clarity and processes maintained by structure lose coherence i.e. it is no longer clear what is separate, what the differences are between anything or where events are leading. When working structures are too disorganized or incompetent, the dynamic process of learning may take longer for the development and integration of structures - the forms of authority necessary for managing an 'inner' (individual or team) environment and the relationship between an inner and outer environment (team and other teams, institution and society). In some situations individuals may not be able to cope, teams disintigrate and institutions either fail, cannot adapt to change or are unable to be creative, as may teams and individuals.

Dynamics within the system

In the OU teams in Faculties prepare course materials for production by the Operations Division (editing, design and printing) and eventual presentation to students (including tuition and assessment by part-time tutors. Regional Centre staff manage the appointment of part-time tutors, activities in study centres and the residential schools - the main place where different staff work together. Within this structure the centre-periphery (Walton Hall-Region) dimension provides an important focus of anxiety about interdependence. In particular, the authority-dependence dimension of relationships may become focused in a course team in two ways - (a) in the relation of the institution to the team and (b) in the importance of academic content compared to teaching, although these are not the only ways. In residential schools, the relative importance of tuition compared to counselling is also a focus of difference about authority so that counsellors may find it difficult to be accepted as equal members of a team. The tensions about authority-dependence may also be focused on many other staff in different parts of the institution.

Within the two situations of course teams and residential schools, certain staff are more likely to find themselves marginalized or their capabilities and authority denigrated as they are used to represent 'dependency' and associated with anxieties about different aspects of structure compared to process i.e. central academics may represent anxieties about quality of content (and how peers will judge it) in opposition to a staff tutor's concern about quality of teaching. In residential schools, tutors may be most concerned about getting through all the materials in contrast to a counsellor's interest in student support. Although their roles may pre-dispose staff towards defending these interests, this alone does not account for the extreme polarization which occurs in some situations, nor do differences in personalities.

In situations of excessive anxiety, people may take up an 'either or' position in which structure (course content) is seen in oppostion to processes (learning). Persecutory anxieties (about 'external' threats) may become focused on the chair of a course team, especially at early stages of preparation. Because the chair and course manager work at the boundary between team and institution, they may become a focus of mixed, ambivalent feelings about an institution which supports, constrains and makes demands about the amount of work to be done by a certain time. Efforts to manage may initially be ignored by the team thus provoking severe doubts in the chair or manager about their ability i.e. they are made to feel the anxieties about 'beginnings' which team members cannot tolerate at such an early stage of work. The dynamic process may be described in terms of splitting hopes and fears apart and this fragmentation is represented by conflict between individuals and groups.

However, what has been split apart will usually be re-integrated but with a difference. Now, depressive anxieties about destructiveness 'inside' (inner capabilities) have to be tolerated and contained as differentiation of roles become clarified (who is responsible for what), stereotyping is resolved and the real complexity of relationships accepted. In the stress of residential schools it may be particularly difficult to hold on to one's role and an insecure tutor may temporarily abandon some responsibilities for managing the tutor-student or tutor-tutor relationship.

The chair of a course team may also be idealized at one moment and denigrated in the next. We can understand this process through psychodynamic theory. If team members are unable to tolerate depressive anxieties (hope for success in confrontation with fear about failure), the chair will take them up, if only because he must think through plans and relate distant objectives to decisions needed now. To some extent the chair may be provoked to a high or manic level of activity, feeling that he carries most of the responsibility but also relieving some of his anxieties by 'acting 'on rather than thinking about them. Thus, he appears to be an excessively capable and efficient leader who may be absolutely depended on but he may not find much personal meaning for himself in this 'group induced' state. Although some actions may be appropriate others may be premature. The team members will also be relieved by thinking someone else is responsible, the leader, until they are able to be sufficiently clear about their individual roles in the team i.e. to work effectively at all level of structure and process (aims, values, beliefs). Idealization or dependency is an unstable state for two reasons - it is not based on reality of the present time (it is only in the future) and the structure of boundaries is not providing a place to mediate relationships. So idealization will alternate with denigrating the authority of the chair e.g. ignoring his attempts to manage. Regression to dependency and covert resistance (flight/fight) to a leader may rapidly alternate until the authority of the team in relation to the institution is sufficiently clear, anxieties contained and work controlled.

External consultants brought in to write course materials or contribute to TV programmes may also be made to feel like dependent 'students' when the team puts extraordinary expectations on them, although this is probably less common than what full-time staff have to suffer with and through each other. BBC producers may also become caught up in such dynamics. It is important to also look at the team in context as it attempts to learn from experiences in a very dynamic situation.

A team is located within a very highly structured system where everything has to be spelled out to a degreee of detail which outsiders would find persecutory, especially if they try to adapt OU procedures in conventional institutions. For example, the legal and moral requirements which OU staff feel in relation to the examination system means everything is checked many times for accuracy, reliability and validity so that answers are available for any challenge to examination results - which are sometimes changed on the basis of the clear criteria. Other institutions which attempt to take up an OU approach to exams may also find the need to develop teams which will (unconsciously) also function to contain anxieties.

In all these examples, relationships which are directly available are being used to resolve anxieties about those which are not or have not been directly available because of the 'distanced' nature of distance education. The opportunities to address anxieties about the relative importance between structures (institution, content, tutors) and process (team work, teaching, student support) makes an essential contribution to learning by staff as well as students. For successful integration (or interdependence) of different systems (in the institution) or capabilities (of students) anxieties about interdependence (dependency between an inside and outside) must be resolved.

Learning through experience

In a sense, teams, regional centre and residential schools all function to contain anxieties which make interdependent relationships, learning and development possible.

Some learning takes place at an unconscious level and is reflected by the loss of clarity about boundaries and loss in the capacity to contain anxieties. Regression towards less competent states of ability provides a temporary relief from anxiety about the potential destructiveness in relationships. Stereotyping others or acting-out fears, rather than thinking about them, avoids having to think about complexity before one is able to. Boundaries do not function to mediate relationships nor teams to contain processes. However, as fantasies about imagined fears are tested out in reality and combined with some belief in one's creative ability, new spontaneous and unplanned ideas emerge such as an enlarged concept of what a team does and who is included (with their roles) in its membership.

The apparent paradox in two views of the OU - 1. that it is an excessively complex and constraining structure and 2. that there is a lack of structure to acknowledge individual contributions or understand how one fits into any system - is an expression of the unresolved and unresolvable tension between structure (authority) and process (dependence).

In my opinion, only a psychodynamic theory is sufficiently powerful to understand the context of distance education and how the institution affects the work of individuals. Conflict theory places the negative and positive aspects of experience in perspective and helps us to see the function of anxieties and defenses against anxiety in learning. Without the availability of structures to express, act out and resolve the dynamic tensions inherent in the teacher-learner relationship, very little creativity or learning could be sustained - beyond the application of formulas or rote learning.

The Tavistock consultants told us much about these process thirteen years ago but our lack of familiarity with their psychoanalytic based theory, its application in institutions and the lack of sufficient examples meant that we needed many more years to build up our own experiences to reflect back and consider where we have been and where we want to go from now.

The Preliminary Tavistock report

Fifty one staff were interviewed by three consultants from the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations. All six Faculties were represented and about 1/4 of those interviewed represented an additional eight divisions of the OU including Administration, Operations (graphic design, editors), Project Control, Personnel, Library, Regional Academic Services (RAS) and the nurse. In retrospect, the one interview in RAS in no way sufficiently represented regional activities - especially residential schools. Although we had a representative sample of staff in the centre, the consultants lacked some of the experiences (in Regional Centres and summer schools) necessary to understand the total system and their picture may have been, consequently, more limited.

Although nineteen staff attended the Preliminary report, the representation of different groups was disappointing. Only two out of six Faculties were represented and only two out of eight other divisions were represented (Personnel and the nurse). To be fair, those who attended had personal and professional interests in what the consultants had to say. Those interviewed were obviously less involved, initially, until August when the written report was available. Most of the participants were from IET or the technology course team which had been observed. It was not until the printed report was available six months later that we obtained a representative response and it was so mixed that our IET 'steering group' felt obliged to conduct interviews (26 in total) to help validate the Tavistock consultant's hypotheses.

The consultants reported that in the interviews a number of concerns came up repeatedly, especially the sense of disappointment in the present compared to the past. The consultants attributed this to a number of reasons - 1. the lack of space to contain anxieties and work them through so that depressing feelings were projected into creative people impairing their creativity, 2. that ideology about technology made relationships very instrumental so that staff used each other rather than cared for one another and 3. that the utopian ideals about attaining a fairer society were now seen as not achievable. They thought that after ten years the OU was approaching a transition point and that is why they were invited into the OU at this time. During the preliminary report staff had difficulty understanding a number of ideas such as despair and why creativity emerged out of a capacity for containing depressing feelings. Unfortunately, two hours is not enough time to teach anyone about psychodynamic theory, especially if the staff are also immersed in the powerful dynamics of a distance education environment.

The fact that Gordon Lawrence chose a psycho-therapist, Irene Young, to be his main co-worker reflects the close link between therapy, education and consultancy which developed at the TIHR from the 1940s. Thus, the views that Gordon and Irene expressed in the first formal report on their consultancy were complimentary but with a difference. Irene stressed the impact of regressive behaviour on team work (polarization and 'acting-out') while Gordon applied this view to the total environment with some attention to the more spiritual dimension, compared to Irene's focus on how functional relationships are affected by technological values through relationships which are 'instrumental' i.e. people treat each other more as objects to be used to attain goals. Given the limited time available, it was difficult for them to see how regressive behaviour actually contributes to the work and where and how depressing feelings are worked out. We now know that, because the course team Irene observed was at a late stage of production (handing over final drafts) she probably did not see the most difficult stage of course development (discussions between first and second drafts) and how resolution of problems is part of team development.

We can also see some of the consequences of the effects of the institution, especially the dynamics, on the consultancy. First, the report begins and ends with a strong input by John, the chair of the team which had been observed and the anxieties which the method of 'process consultancy' can provoke are revealed. Second, the consultants also appeared to be strongly affected by their contact with the OU so their anxieties were difficult to contain as well. Such pressure is, in fact, an important source of information for anyone taking up a process consultancy role. As a result, in my opinion, Gordon had difficulty keeping the distinction between depression (actual loss) and depressive anxiety (fear of loss) clear and it is possible that the depressive anxieties he absorbed made it difficult to produce the final written report by the agreed time (April) and it was delayed four months to August 1979. This is more a statement of admiration for their work than a criticism and it is only a guess on my part. A brief review of the report may help the reader into it.

Brief review of the report

I have divided the report into four sections and additional sub-sections to help link my review with the transcript in Appendix C. My comments are inserted in (brackets).

1. Introduction

A Two aims of the study are to look at the experience of course teams (of members and other staff) and the function of IET and its future (which was clarified further in the written report).

B. Initially it was difficult coming to the OU but as they (Gordon and Irene) interviewed staff they began to feel that their skills were trusted. Now that they were ending they felt sad because they had got somewhere and wished to continue the relationship.

C. Their aim was to disentangle what is in the institution ('outer world') from the inner world of the individual i.e. how institutional myths and unquestioned individual assumptions 'determine' relationships, distort reality and exclude spontaneous (and creative) behaviour. Things which cannot be known are 'mystifications'.

D. Ten years on (1969-1979) the OU is at a point of transition which is why they have been brought in.

E. At this point, John shares some of his concerns with Irene who observed his team e.g. why she didn't ask questions - reply, that would be asking him to sort out what she was (potentially, to be negotiated) there for, to create a space for thinking about the experiences. (It might have helped here if she had described an important aspect of a technique influenced by psychoanalysis i.e. to be available for projections, which are largely unconscious, about authority and dependence. To an extent, part of the difficulty here was a clash of cultures between those who teach, and strive for clarity, and those who focus on anxiety (unclarity) in relationships to better understand difficulties about living and boundaries between individual and group and institution. At the time I felt very anxious about this unresolved and delayed confrontation but now see it as an illuminating experience i.e. I was made to feel what beginnings are like, in anxiety terms, with hopes for success combining with fears about failure. Consequently, I am now better able to understand anxieties of learners at a distance as well as teams beginning work or new members joining a team).

2. Life in course teams.
(A metaphor for course team life which Irene introduces in this section is of a failed marriage with some parallel between husband/wife and teacher/student. This reflects a therapeutic bias)

A. Course teams have an 'instrumental' culture, the lowest level of three levels of relationship - instrumental, functional - where most work is and spiritual. (As we will see, these are related to feelings of isolation, 'acting out' of anxieties and despair because of separation in relationships (absent students, lack of honesty in teams about experience (no containment or negotiation about roles) and failed ideas (no hope or belief). Emphasis on time span or meeting deadlines has replaced the ability to celebrate development of a team and completion of tasks. To avoid disappointment, work is focused on instrumental goals instead of relationships (where a sense of a past and history might be kept alive).

B. The life span is a source of anxiety because a course team, in effect, dies when the task of preparation is finished so there is no on-going group to belong to. The absence of students poses a particular problem for junior staff who are then unable to establish their own identity and sense of worth compared to senior staff - thus there may be a more diffuse sense of anxiety, difficult to locate, focus on or resolve for junior staff. (There may be an increased sense of one's own mortality when joining an institution which seems to have no ending and is 'immortal'. In contrast, staff who were in at the beginning in 1969 may have a different sense of loss of a 'good' beginning in which individual initiative was easier if only because the institutional environment was less complex and was being created. Gordon's later point about death seems to link here).

C. Senior staff have more space for 'play', a space in which anxieties about human relations (team work) in a technological environment may be expressed and worked through. Junior staff are more locked into production and the technology culture because they have less choice about work and they want to get promoted, thus their creative energy is drained (with the absence of a dynamic tension between structure - technology - and process or relationships).

D. The desire to make all learning conscious denies the unconscious aspects of learning and the gap is filled by despair (when depressive anxieties are not worked through and a sense of time and space is lost through fragmentation - no boundaries or containment). There is no container for anxiety, accountability or framework for understanding how a course team works. Criticisms of course materials are felt as criticism of one's whole self and this is compounded by the lack of feed back from students. Thus, there is a reluctance to work over old material and improve it (limiting IET's role) in preference to starting something new (and forgetting the past).

E. An analogy is leaving a marriage for a new affair or there is no Penelopy waiting at home, re-weaving and undoing old mistake. There is no delegation of work, teams fragment and individuals in smaller groups get on with their work (or individualized consultancies in IET), there is no induction to course team work. Course chairs are seen as either authoritarian or slackers and this is a primitive or regressed level of thinking (polarizing between boundaries with no transitions in space or time - beginnings, middle and endings).

F. (In this subsection there are mostly questions about technical terms and the consultants are pulled into a 'teaching' role which, in retrospect, I see as a lost opportunity for staff to share their experience and feelings. Had I understood more at the time, I might have suggested that the questions reflected anxiety about the limited time available and the ending of a relationship which hardly seemed to have begun or to have been very nurturing. Thus, in their questions staff may have felt a need to get as much out of the consultants as possible rather than facing fears about their own unformulated and unfocused needs i.e. we slipped back partly into an instrumental culture locked into unresolved relationships from the past). Gordon uses the term 'mocking' to describe the resonance between inside (individual) and outside (environment) and I now think this was an unconscious recognition that this type of questioning made a mockery out of what we were trying to do together. Thus, we maintained a lack of closeness which could have come out of trust and recognition of how we were really different. This is a disappointing section because what has been said before is repeated but interesting looked at in terms of the dynamics - partly reflected in the difficult to understand comments and questions).

3. Environment of the OU

(Gordon does not get as far into this section as Irene did because he is now addressing the inter-group level of the OU and the anxieties associated lead to questions sooner)

A. The systems which staff have created in the OU may now be experienced as more constraining than facilitating, although everyone might wish otherwise. (This hopeful expression rather over-looks the fact that institutional structure may function as defenses against anxiety) There is a great cost to individuals from working in such a constraining environment.

B. Staff who are unable to contain their depressing feelings project them into staff who are able to take them in because of their creativity (in psychoanalytic theory, creativity is seen as a product of resolving depressive anxieties) but the result is a lowering of creativity because a sense of reality is lost when relationships are not available to think about what is going on. (Manic activities are not creative. This sub-section is also dominated by questions with more answers given than feelings shared and confusion between depression and depressing feelings). The important point is that 'free-floating' feelings are denied and not available for sorting out relationships. Irene suggests that 'constraint' is a more appropriate term than depression and Gordon suggests the term 'social depression' for being depressed in one's role and unable to learn from each other or keep an open boundary.

C. Energy becomes used to defend personal boundaries rather than for creativity

D. Awareness of death leads to feelings of despair when one is isolated and feels that there is no future. With the ability to engage with despair and feelings of 'nothingness' (not filling this up with things) offering 'social help' become possible - we are able to disentangle the reality of nothingness from untested assumptions and choose myths which help us question reality or realities.

E. Unless we can engage with disillusion there is no 'social hope'. The OU was formulated on Utopian ideals which suggest that - 1. the future depends on technological advancement and 2. we can rectify social wrongs (class system) by making University education available to all. Ten years on we now realize that this vision cannot be realized so what is to take its place?

F. The OU is a threat to all other universities who might now have to change confronted with our successes (in 1992 more are offering distance education). The OU course 'Schooling and Society' attracted criticism because it questioned myths and assumptions but it also represented the potential for change which we might have in society by inducting everyone into new ways of thinking and questioning. (Much of this section is a review of what has already been said)

G. The most simple form of control in the OU is by the manipulation of time which supports a climate of 'coercive compliance' which is punitive and which individuals avoid by working at home or getting medically depressed.

H. A technological metaphor has taken over life in the OU which people have to react against.

I. We need to create a new 'ontological" (self developing) metaphor and create a space for people to play, to be creative, to find structures which will enable people to work creatively. We need to engage with destructiveness and creativity, which are intimately bound up, and in doing this we will be able to contain all our feelings as well as all our abilities.

4. Concluding discussion.

There is some hope expressed that this kind of enquiry will continue but a need to see it in print to reflect on what has been said. John brings our attention back to the problem of understanding and trust in Irene's relationship with the course team. The OU reflects a lot of what goes on in society.

The written Tavistock report

The ten page report 'The Open University' (included in TCC report 66) briefly summarizes what was presented above with an emphasis on positive as well as difficult aspects of course team work e.g. -

1. punitive experiences in course team work are at a considerable cost for some individuals.
2. the most threatening aspect of course teams is criticism which is felt to be personal.

3. there are no 'containers' for anxieties about dependency which would help people manage themselves i.e. working out dependency in a conventional teacher-student relationship.
4. denial of the unconscious makes it difficult to learn from uncomfortable experiences so staff then prefer to turn to the new rather than improve the old.
5. despair can be seen as a mid-life crisis for the institution as well as individuals and in response to failed ideals which cannot be talked about.
6. IET has to be made impotent and has become a container for disappointment.

What staff thought of these ideas is explored further in TCC report No 76 'Open University staff reactions to the Tavistock report'.

Appendix A. Chronology of Tavistock Project and relevant events

1977

September - attend two month course on groups, A. Hoad recommends other courses at TIHR, Grubb Institute, Marrigage Guidance Council, Institute of Group Analysis (IGA)

December - initial discussion with Gordon Lawrence, TIHR. First draft of project proposal

1978

February - second draft of project proposal to IET and THIR. Also shared with Prof. J. Beishon who negotiates another project with other TIHR consultants (E. Stern) beginning in the Autumn on relations in the Systems discipline

March - IET seminar presented by G. Lawrence - attended by nine IET staff plus L. Bailey, G. Davey, B. Cosin, J. Sparkes, C. Row and five members of OU Consultancy Service. Lawrence also conducts discussions in the afternoon with OU staff. Lawrence has discussions with J. Chapple, B. Francis, M. Hussey, A. Northedge, B. Zimmer, E. Henderson

April - third draft of project proposal. IET seminar on group dynamics presented by W. Bramley, IGA

May - IET approval of Tavistock project (15 days for interviews, 10 days participant-observation in T232), formation of IET Steering group. Agree with T232 course team for I. Young to observe (for 20 meetings beginning June 13) and negotiate about taking up a consultancy role

June - Discussions with J. Dixon, R. Glatter, P. Hamilton. Inteviews with T. Weaver, J. Marriott,

October - interviews with G. Vesey, J. Henry, A. Kettle, M. Lawson, L. Taylor

November - interviews with J. Dixon, B. Zimmer, C. Row, R. Stannard, L. Haynes, J. Chapple, T. O'Shea

1979

January - interviews with R. Pengelly, K. Thompson, J. Oates, W. Prescott, J. Dixon, B. Bell, J. Field, B, MacIntosh

February - preliminary report by G. Lawrence and I. Young, note to IET Faculty liason representative about uses of report and implications for training. Discussion of workshop with J. Martin, Systems (conducted in July by A. Houston)

June - J. Riley takes nine months study leave (not available for responses to written report

July - IET workshop postponed because of financial contraints

August - draft written Tavistock report ('The Open University') discussed by Steering group and distributed to staff interviewed

September - University secretary requests copy of report for PVCs. Begin 25 follow-up interviews by IET Steering group

October - P. Davey hospitalized so he as well as Judith miss reactions to report

November - Open House articles on report, also appear in national press, accompanied by controvery in OU

Appendix B. List of staff interviewed by Tavistock consultants

(CT = members of course team observed T232 Engineering Mechanics: Solids -presented 1980-1989)

Dr. K. Attenborough, Technology
L. Bailey, Post-Experience
R.E. Bell, Educational Studies
T. Bright, Technology (CT)
P.H.W. Bristow, Administration
Dr. M. Bullivant, Science
J.N. Chapple, Operations
Dr. J. Dixon, Technology (CT)
D. Edwards, IET
Dr. J. Field, IET
M. Geffen, IET
P. Hamilton, Social Sciences
Prof. D. Hawkridge, IET
Prof. L. Haynes, Science
Dr. E. Henderson, IET
P. Higgins, designer, Operations
Prof. M. Hussey, Technology (CT)
P. Jules, Technology
Prof. A. Kettle, Arts
M. Lawson, Administration
F. Lockwood, IET
J. Marriott, editor, Operations
A. Marven, Nurse
E. Milburn, Administration
Prof. N. McIntosh, IET
A.D. Metcalfe, Project Control
J. Oates, Educational Studies
T. O'Shea, IET
Prof. R.M. Pengelly, Mathematics
W. Prescott, Educational Studies
R. Reveson, editor, Operations
P. Richards, Technology (CT)
C. Row, Personnel
L. Rogers, designer, Operations

Dr. G. Salaman, Social Sciences
Prof. R. Stannard, Science
Dr. D. Sewart, RAS
Prof. J. Sparkes, Technology
Dr. I. Stevenson, Technology
M. Steward, Technology (CT)
D. Thompson, Technology (CT)
Prof. G. Vesey, Arts
R. Waller, IET
Sir T. Weaver, Educational Studies
Prof. J. Wilmer, IET
M. Wright, Library

IET Steering Group
Prof. B. Lewis
P. Davey
Dr. R. Nicodemus
A. Northedge
J. Riley
Dr. R. Zimmer

Appendix C. Preliminary Tavistock report, Thursday 22 February 1979

The transcript is divided into four parts and the proportion of the total is indicated in (brackets) - 1. Introduction by Gordon Lawrence (1/6) 2. Life in course teams by Irene Young (1/3) 3. The environment of the OU by Gordon (1/3) and 4. Concluding discussion (1/6). I identify the two consultants by name plus John (chair of the team observed by Irene) and three members of the IET Tavistock study steering group (Brian Lewis, Judith Riley and myself). The list of nineteen people attending is given at the end. Comments about 'reds' and 'greens' refer to coloured circles Gordon drew on the board, green representing people who work at the 'macro' level of the institution who export their depressing feelings to the reds - people who are available to take such feelings in because of their creativity.

Transcript (the four main sections are also divided into sub-sections)

1. Introduction

A.

Gordon: Ladies and Gentlemen, I think, at least we think, and the way we will be speaking is that in the sense of 'I'm speaking', you can be pretty well assured that there is something that I've worked through with Irene and vice versa. But nonetheless we have got some sort of division of labour for this afternoon. I think one way to regard this afternoon is to regard it as some sort of workshop, if you will, whereby we will try to get back to you what is inside us, as to what we have received from you and processed in some sort of way. And therefore I think that neither of us, in fact we are quite clear about this, neither of us will be upset if you interrupt us. Neither of us will be upset if you propose an alternative hypothesis to the ones that we are putting forward, and I think also that in a presentation like this it is inevitable, I think that there will be difficulties of language. It may be that we may use words in a particular kind of way and it would be better if in fact whatever meaning we have in our heads was explored along with what meaning you have in your heads and then somehow or other it will be taken on from where we are at, at the present moment. So these are the preliminary statements that I want to make in relation to this afternoon. Let me start off by talking a little bit about the background to the study. The study started with Robert Nicodemus coming to see me at the Tavistock Institute and us talking about what it was like to be in the Open University. The outcome of this was that Robert arranged for us to come down and meet some of you here in IET. and as I remember it there was certainly two meetings and in the course of these meetings I think what we were exploring was some sort of possible, professional link between my Institution and your Institution. The outcome of this was the agreement that it might be worthwhile looking at the experience people had with course teams. But then we pondered around this and it became clear that if we just looked at course teams, as such, we would be splitting off just

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one factor of the environment and looking at that and not relating it to a larger environment. And so the idea grew that it might be worthwhile providing opportunities for people to be interviewed in order that they could talk about, essentially, course teams. That was the sort of link in, but really to talk about the larger Open University. The outcome of all this was that Robert took responsibility for organising the interviews and basically he would then relay them through to us and we would come and interview you and talk to you and so on. The brief that we were given then was to look at course teams but at the same time, as I've just been saying, it was also to find out what was going on in the larger Open University. And of course thirdly, which really was the point at which we had started, was really to find out what role, or what function probably would be the better word in this context, what function IET had in the University at large and to consider what future IET might have. The methods that we used were of two kinds primarily, one that Irene Young was able to get a contract with one course team and she built up a relationship with them and worked with them over quite a substantial period and secondly, we conducted the interviews.

B.

I think its worthwhile saying that we have spent a long time really being quite reluctant to come to the Open University. Somehow it was an effort to get in a motor car, it was even worse to come by train up to the Open University and this went on for, what, two or three months - something like that. Then somehow or other it began to change, the feel of it began to change and it has to be said that Irene was the one who carried the long term relationship with you because I was going off to other places and then coming back and so forth. But no matter where I have been I found myself, as soon as I got back from London, giving Irene a telephone call and saying 'What's happening about the Open University' and I found myself more and more caught up with the Open University. And at this juncture where we are, in effect, ending the relationship, I think that we both feel a bit sad about it because we sort of feel, well we've got somewhere and it could have gone on. This I think has to be related to the odd experiences in the interviewing which was over a long period of time. Robert has mentioned the figure 10 months, that's at the outside, and at one point I got quite worried about the pacing of this particular study. My fantasy was, one could go in get the stuff and out again. But I think the way it worked out, the pacing was right because our experience was, as the interviews went on, that people were saying to us 'You ought to see so and so'. In other words, people were recommending to us other people that we might see, so that we began to feel that we were accepted in some sort of way and that perhaps people could be entrusted with the thoughts and ideas, and so on. Now, the brief has been delightfully open ended. Essentially we have been enquiring into experiences, or being available for people to tell us about their experiences. As you are familiar by now, it was very rare that we asked a question. We very often would start the interview by saying "well what's your understanding of what the meetings about?", or words to that effect, and just taking it from there. And I think that the richness of the data which has been generated is not due in any way to our skills but is in fact due to your skills in being able to entrust us with material. So that's by way of introduction. I think that I also want to say something at this junction about the concepts and values that we have got to bear on this particular consultation.

C.

I think I have to say that because you will then be able, from your conceptual frameworks and your value points, to question what it is that we are putting forward. I think I can state this very simply. First of all there is a commitment on both our parts to the idea that all enterprises, all institutions or all organisations can be seen as open systems. That is to say that they take materials and all sorts of things from the outside world. They transform them in some way and put them out again. An open systems theory, which I see as simply being a heuristic device for trying to understand organisations, I think enables us to try and puzzle out what is the relationship, always the relationship between an enterprise (and I draw everything in circles and you can interpret that) between an enterprise and its environment. And we are always interested in what is taking place across the boundary of a particular entity or enterprise. The open systems theory, we believe, can be applied to human beings. As you are familiar, certainly Irene and myself hold to some kind of psycho-analytic perspective on human beings. I'll explain further what I mean by this in a moment. But essentially I think that we are always interested in what is going on in the inner world of the individual and what the individual is transacting across their personal boundary with the outer world and trying to puzzle out what, if you will, is being projected out and what is being introjected back in. And indeed this notion of what you project out and what you take back in from the environments of other people, of objects in the environment and so on and so forth, is one which has been an organising metaphor, I think, for us throughout the whole study, as I hope we will be able to make clear. I've mentioned psychoanalysis and I would want to make this point very firmly at this junction that neither of us are concerned with defining the world as being full of patients and suitable cases for treatment. It seems to me that this is a very narrow view of psychoanalysis. We are concerned as to disentangling what are the cultural demands made upon people within institutions. Psychoanalysis is always about sorting out what is determined. It is not about the spontaneous, it is about sorting out what is determined. And if you will, that's the way that we use psychoanalysis and have used it in this particular study, is to try and disentangle what are the myths and the assumptions, however you spell it, of the culture at large which gets taken in by people, introjected by people and projected back out again to make the culture and to make the myths and to make the assumptions. And I think as a rider to that, that we are interested in the idea of a self-managing individual - let us say somebody who can disentangle what is in their inside world, what's in their inner worlds in relation to the outside and, as it were, using the ego, the leadership parts themselves to be continually questioning the environment in which they live. And that includes both the outside environment and the inside environment. The notion then about myths and assumptions or myths and what I sometimes call mysteries, because one of the difficult things is to sort out what are myths and what are assumptions, that is to say what are the fictions that men and women create around them and to differentiate these from mysteries which are things that one cannot tell, and having to live with this awful problem - that one cannot know everything. And I think that part of that, if you want to use another word, that these myths and assumptions and so on and so forth could be called mystifications - which is the sort of things that we do to each other all the time in institutions. So in some ways what we are going to try to be doing this afternoon is to induct you into what we understand to be the myths and assumptions and mystifications of the Open University.

D.

The last point that I want to make is this. We have pondered for a long time as to why it was that we were invited in. After all its a fairly bizarre arrangement. One of you came to the Tavistock Institute and should ask for us to come in and even more bizarre that we should actually get money to come in. We puzzled a lot about this. At one level, yes of course its about the role of IET. Its about finding out about some of the experiences of course teams and so on and so forth. But I think, where we are just now, I think that we began to be aware as the interviews went on, that in actuality you and the Open University are at some sort of period of transition. The problem is that nobody is very sure from what to what but it no less was a feeling of transition, a feeling of change around it. And it maybe is that you have invited us in because it would enable you to sort out something about these transitions. Well, I've said something about the introduction to the study and what we propose to do is to talk about course teams, which Irene will do, and then I will talk about the larger environment of the Open University and I'll put out on behalf of the two of us some hypotheses, and finally we would want to initiate some sort of discussion on what would be the possible future role of IET. Is there anything that you want to ask me at this point?

E.

John: I could raise one query actually, is this point - that you are not asking questions? At quite an early stage, and it's present in our course team, that there was an obvious reluctance to thrust ourselves forward and really ask questions and to sort of interrogate this. And actually I think this is quite a problem because we felt sufficiently busy not to want to draw upon ourselves additional complications. And I felt personally it would have been more effective and maybe informative, if you had come in 'all guns firing', asking lots of questions.

Question: Are you going to answer that, or are you asking for more questions?

Gordon: I'm quite happy to answer that, yes.

Comment: I'm not saying you should answer it. I've just got a point to make myself.

Gordon: I think that where I'm right, is that where I tend not to ask questions in the initial set of interviews and just sort of be there to kind of absorb it. And the reason is that if I ask you a question

I'm really asking you to sort out something in my head. And the fact that I pose the question means that I'm actually structuring up what's in your head to get an answer.

John: Yes, that's fair enough but I still think it could have been better.

Irene: I can answer that if you would like me to. The contract was that I would move in to the role of consultant when it seemed appropriate and in fact there was great difficulty in moving into that role. First of all there was the reason that Gordon has given, that you wait to get the climate that you are working in. Now I would say that the climate that I worked in with that particular course team (John's) was that there wasn't much space for me to come in, and I'll enlarge on that later because I would like to talk about how I see consultancy. Perhaps there is some validity in what you are saying, John, because when I did come in I described it, I think to the course team, and certainly felt it myself as making a D day landing. You know that it had been left so long that the barge had been out there in the Channel and I had no choice but to embark and I felt rather uncomfortable about that, but there was something about a space, and I was very much aware that the space was created by somebody from Project Control who was in that day questioning you about progress. And somehow in the wake of that there was space left for me to come in and make comments. I take your point that in some ways I would like to come in more gradually. My perception is that I did ask questions. They were usually fairly computised because I was only too aware that I was sitting with a few 'O' level Chemistry and Physics in an engineering mechanics meeting trying desperately to follow what you were saying and sometimes making surprising sense of it - surprising to me in terms of content. I could understand the dynamics of what was going on. It was the dynamics that didn't leave me enough space because there was a fairly tight struggle going on in the first meetings that I was at and I had to wait until there seemed to be some sort of opening in that struggle for me to come in and make some comments. I'm not sure whether that answers your question but that is my perception.

John: No, I can understand that you had that view. Its just that it didn't seem that way - you could have made things together.

Irene: What is perhaps significant, and I think that this is significant of the Open University culture, that nobody actually questioned me. Because I was there equally open to being questioned as to questioning, and nobody really asked me and what I felt was that the overwhelming feeling was of a certain mistrust and suspicion of me as if I was in there to scrutinize in some way and was seen as a rather negative figure, initially for a long time. Now I didn't deliberately build that up but that in itself builds up some sort of resistance to any easy entry.

John: Well, I would suggest that that was some sort of a myth that you were projecting.

Irene: Well, I wonder because I am not new to this game and the feeling was to wait until there was some feeling but perhaps the waiting got too long. Perhaps it turned into a war of attrition rather than a waiting. It wasn't how it was meant to be. But the second thing was that it was a very long time before I could break the barrier and come in.

John: Well, so all I was trying to say was that I think that really could have been shorter. Obviously I might be wrong but, you see, it could have been shorter maybe.

Irene: Well, I think for the reason that Gordon says, because as a consultant we don't want to be an intrusion into what's going on and you have to get the feel of things before you can make some comment. Otherwise it would be like premature ejaculation - you'd be coming in too fast, you know, and perhaps imposing your views on the situation rather than getting the feel of the situation. And indeed that's one of the difficult roles of consultancy, that you have to bear a good deal of uncertainty and chaos inside yourself waiting for things formulate rather than imposing your own formulations on them.

John: Without wanting to strain this out indefinitely but there seems more point to me, that your actual reluctance to be more active actually was one of the most worrying things.

Irene: But nobody said that to me, which is interesting.

Comment: I just wanted to say that it seemed to be in your mind that we were particularly interested in the roles or functions of IET. But of course we are equally interested in the role and function and future survival or otherwise, of the course team. In my mind the two things are intimately connected rather than thinking of the one as being more under scrutiny than the other.

Irene: Just to say that I was struck very early on by the amount of what I would call mirroring that goes on in the Open University - that what you have just said reflects back on how IET saw, or did not see, their role and the uncertainties about that. And at some point you have to wait to see what is being reflected. These paradigms were held in our heads about IET and course teams and indeed about the whole Open University and its function. But there is a point where that has to be just held and waited with.

Gordon: Fine. Well perhaps if we went on to the course teams, plural, it will be helpful.

2. Life in course teams

A.

Irene I've chosen to reflect the view, in the life of course teams, through the comments of some 45 interviews which, between us, we have conducted because I felt that to elaborate on my experience as a consultant with this particular course team would feel like a betrayal of confidentiality. I think perhaps here I would like to define betrayal. I think betrayal is seen in rather melodramatic terms in life and it was through painful, personal insights that I realised that betrayal is about, for my money, the inability to stay with pain and the flight from that. So I didn't want to betray the course team and as this project progressed, the notion of the betrayal became more important because we found ourselves in a culture which tends to be instrumental. I was struck by how people used each other very much as objects or resources. And, as Gordon and I were discussing, the material that we had to formulate, I was saying to him, that the definition that I adhered to from my student days when I was lucky enough to have John McMurray as my professor of moral philosophy - who was a man far ahead of his time, who talked in the 30s about many of the things that were talked about in the 60s and 70s - and he defined all human relationships as being conducted on three levels, the lowest of which is the instrumental, which is to use other people like things. And he gave as a definition of that, slavery, when a person is just a thing that serves you. The next level was to have a functional relationship which is where you join together to perform some given work or task and is the kind of relationship that most of us have in our working lives. And the highest level, what he described as the Christian Ethic, although he was a very late converter to Quakerism himself, was the personal level where youtreat people as persons in their own right, and where there is a relationship of mutuality and reciprocity. Having said that I go back to my word that we have found ourselves in a culture which tends to be instrumental. And we would like, after today's meeting, to leave it in such a way that people in this meeting will feel free to respond on a personal level to us about their experiences. I was struck in the interviews by the fact that 90% of people, if not more, mentioned course teams quite voluntarily and that the overwhelming feeling that came over from them was one of disappointment. Now this is not to say that the course team doesn't function, does not work, does not produce goods. And its the main throughput system for producing what the students consume. But somehow it was a disappointing experience for most people who'd been on course teams. We worked together over quite a period to produce our findings for today and it was only on Sunday, no Saturday, when I was listening to Radio 3 to a criticism of Isaac McShea, of Singers latest novel, and I'm sure you are all aware that he's the Nobel Prize Winner. He's written a novel called Shusha which is basically about how a man chose to stay in the ghetto in Poland, rather than to escape to safety. And he stayed in the ghetto with Shusha who was a mentally defective girl who he had loved but who also symbolises the innocence and perhaps potential of humanity. The sentence that struck me out of the critical discussion that went on was that Singer presents the aim of literature as being to prevent time from vanishing and this had an enormous amount of resonance for me, with all that had been said to me about course teams, because the time span was a very important one. I thought about it afterwards, and I thought surely that's the basic human dilemma, that we don't want time to vanish, in that 'where has time gone?'. What mark have we left on it? And it seem to me that as I was listening to people in interviews, the course team became the 'pint pot' which was the repository for a whole range of human needs, because in many ways, what attracts people to the Open University is some potential, some innovative potential that goes with the lack of traditional structure that's in traditional Universities, but in fact there is a lack of meeting point, except in the course teams. It seemed to me, too, that the course team was a very exciting innovation that, the whole idea of correspondence texts and course team material, as opposed to lectures, was colossal in its implications and what it offered in academic terms. But as I thought about it more, on a feeling level linked up to the disappointment, I began to wonder if the metaphor wasn't that it was like a marriage - that it was a coming together for something larger than the individual. And that what happens when course teams come together is that, to avoid the disappointment which they have now come to expect, they instrumentalize the course teams work in terms of goals. And the moment they do this the course team becomes a constraining environment as opposed to a creative one. I'm going, in fact, to give you the material in a very basic crude way. I'm going to just simply give you the comments which were given to me in the hope that you can latch on to these and come in when you want to.

B.

But when I look at the expectations of a course team the first thing that comes to my mind is that the life span, is that there is a death of the course team after the task is finished in most areas. I know there is one discipline where that is not so, but there was a feeling, I think, of wanting to belong to what we call a sentient group, some group that you could identify with and feel you belong to. As well as the production part of the course team, there was a hope for academic creativity, that there was some sort of hope that this would be an autonomous work group. There was a very clearly articulated hope that this would be a learning situation and at this point, I think we have to say that something that interested me from the outset - particularly having worked in a traditional University for four years - was what do you do in the Open University about the lack of students? You know, who carries what? Because I was only too well aware working in Edinburgh University that the students, in our language, carried certain things for the institution or the University. They carry the dependence - they are there to learn. In their role of learning, they define a role, particularly for the junior members of staff, because this also became clear fairly early on in the interviews - that the strains on the junior members of staff were infinitely more than those on the senior members. And the overwhelming feeling that came from the many junior members of staff who were interviewed was one of a diffused kind of anxiety about themselves, about their future, about how they were performing here.

C.

And at that point I would like to draw my well-known diagram, because unlike Gordon, I don't think in diagrams. I think that what we offer most as consultants, because we come in and operate on the boundary from outside, is a possibility of a third dimension. That is a space which you can use as you want to. I became interested in three dimensions towards the end of my psychoanalytic training because I feel that to operate in a third dimension is a fairly sophisticated level of operating. And it is at this point that creativity and play in its best sense are allowed to operate. It's a free space. Now with this away at the back of my mind because I came as much as possible with a blank mind so that things could be put into it from Open University, and I'd like to enlarge on what Gordon said about our coming, perhaps this illustrate some of your own feelings. I first of all came, my first few meetings, along with Gordon and enjoyed the journey up and the journey back to exchange what we were doing. When it came to the ultimo he departed to foreign parts and I stayed here travelling up and down. I was aware of feeling very deprived of anyone to be dependent on and for support and aware of great anxiety as I used to travel up the Ml and of continued feelings of lostness when I arrived here. I continually got lost physically in the Open University, which has some reality in it, and this gradually changed until I became rather like the, I think this is a true story, the Glasgow man at the Picasso exhibition who said 'help, let me out, I'm beginning to like it'. I became aware that I was becoming increasingly involved and a part of what was going on and realised that some of my feelings were perhaps feelings that you had of dealing with the lack of structure as you came in. I used to feel that I was landing on the moon when I got out of the car. I was alright when I got into the first interview and was back into the skills that I was accustomed to using. But there is a feeling of lostness, of lack of structure, of lack of something to support. To go back to my three dimensions - it wasn't until I saw some senior members of staff who obtained a very high level of job satisfaction here, as compared to alot of the junior members of staff, that I began to see how the picture fitted. The senior members of staff who clarified this for me were people who came with a very clear sense of their own professional identity, having already written, having already produced work which had confirmed their names in academic and other circles and who found the challenge of what I call the production part of the Open University a very interesting one. There were also people at a certain life stage which I, in my framework, would call mid-life crisis where they had wanted to diverge from what they were doing and the Open University offered a very exciting challenge for innovation which they found was fulfilled. Now the three circles which I will draw in this way, are the academic ones, there's the team work that you all come in, then the production one that the Open University demands is a highly technological method of learning and a third one. That is a clear structure. Now the senior members of staff were free to write once they were sufficiently senior not to be bothered about their advancement, they had chairs so that space, that third dimension, became something that they could play with which could be creative for the seniors for career and creativity. For more junior staff this was rather more serious because they were coping with the more academic reproduction line and also 'where do I go from here'. And 'where can I go in traditional Universities?' So that the energy that might have been used in creativity (and here I am overstating for focusing) was used up sometimes between these two things with the course team seen as something that was almost depriving of energy because it took away energies that might have gone into academic research. Is that reasonably sensible to most of you, that the third dimension was missing for them?

D.

I was struck too by some sort of difference between some people who had come into Open University from what I would call non-traditional academic circles, who had come in from some learning situation that was in some way unorthodox compared with traditional universities and could cope with the technology of the Open University. And we worked for some time looking at a technological metaphor, which I think the Open University functions under, and it seemed to me that it was something to do with the fact that there is a desire with the technology to make all learning conscious, to concretize learning, which the other side of which means that there is a denial - that a lot of learning is unconscious and therefore, there was a gap which leads to some sort of disappointment and, a word we will use again which was despair. I think I go on from there with just straight comments, and please at any point with any of the comments come in if you want to refute or agree or whatever. One of the things that was said to me earlier on by one of the senior staff was that "all University problems are magnified in the Open University for good or for bad" and I felt that the course team mirrors these. A second statement that came up again and again, although not perhaps in this precise word was that there was no container. Now that in my frame is no container for dependence or anxiety. There is nowhere you feel safe to let go and I think that there was some unconscious hope that the course team might provide that. Something that was said by almost everyone was there was no accountability, no one will accept that they are accountable for anything. The initial idea behind the course team was something about guiding staff how they should teach and that to me was an exciting innovation, having worked in a traditional university where there was a lot of struggle about what constituted good teaching and what didn't. And alongside that, a curious lack of knowledge of how a course team works, the scrutiny within a course team of each other, and that is one of the most threatening aspects. And I think people felt very much under criticism, not just on the level of their competency but in a more total way about their wholeselves. And allied to this and compounding it is a lack of feedback because you don't have students. Although I think it is romantising to think all students feedback how the lecture went, I'm thinking of Edinburgh where an ordinary first class was of 350 students. I don't think there was much feedback for the lecturer from that. Then the boundary for the course team becomes that of the time scale, the deadline when the product has to be brought out and it seemed to me as this was often persecutory, rather as some sort of boundary within which could be creative. There was also, and this came up again and again in interviews, a feeling of tiredness and long term fatigue. particularly amongst people that have been here longer than 8 years. Allied to that there was a refusal to work over old material and always want go on to something new.

E.

If we think of it as a marriage, rather then creating through mutuality and reciprocity a mature relationship with a deep sexual relationship, almost a kind of wanting to launch off into another affair, as the next course team was. And if we are thinking of it in terms of mythology it was as if each course team was an odyssey into the unknown. There was r. Penelopy at home re-weaving and undoing the old material and going over old ground to learn from past mistakes. I was stuck by that, in fact, that it used to interest me at Edinburgh, that you would get an academic rather blushingly and I never quite understood why they were so embarrassed about it, but saying "they were in the academic world to push back the frontiers of knowledge". Now I am fairly certain from the interviews and from my contact with you that that was one of the exciting things about coming to the Open University. And it was quite often articulated in interviews that that was what attracted people, the thought of conveying knowledge to people who had been deprived of the chance of tertiary education at an earlier stage. But somehow that wasn't much around in the day to day dealings. One of the typical, in fact this was put to me and these are the exact words, the typical behaviour of a course team is splitting them into subgroups 3 or 5 to get work done. There was some kind of fragmentation of an inability to delegate, just as there was an inability to say "I'm accountable", an inability to delegate and say "will you do this chunk of work" and really to rely on that. That did go on But it seemed to me a (change tape) shipping off a load of weight to someone who carried it and then found it was too much. It didn't seem to me that there was any real induction to course teams, using an industrial model where there was an induction into departmental workings. It was very clear the importance of course team chairman, and it was put to me by several members of staff, in a rather polarised way, which is a fairly primitive way of thinking, that the course team chairman was either a slacker or authoritarian and either meant that a course team didn't work to up optimum levels. I would think that a fair range of course teams went on in between these two. There is an apparent fear, there seems to me, of dependence and this is linked up to the lack of a container. And for me this linked up to lack of students because I used to be often irritated in Edinburgh at the amount of dependence that students carried for staff. Something positive that was said to me once was discussing someone who was elitist say "this is not the Open University style" and that I would go along with my experience being here that elitism isn't part of the picture.

F.

Question: Would you say more about dependence and carrying dependence because I'm a graduate student.

Irene: Yes. In order to learn Peter, you must be dependent to some extent and its talking about an appropriate level of dependency. Now this is very much where the Open University reflect society, I mean there is this great big myth in society that you are born dependent and that you move through this to a stage where you are totally independent and self sustaining and you don't need anybody. In fact we struggle with this with any sort of setting Gordon and I work in. The struggle is to get an appropriate dependency where you can learn. You can't learn unless you trust and dependence is about using role models and saying I want to learn. And this was put to me very clearly actually at one stage near the end of my time here, where somebody said that "there was not enough possibility of learning". And I suggest what we wanted was an apprenticeship model and that was agreed to. Now students, in a sense, they come and they hear academics and they see how things are done. They do the rest, they go to tutorials and are told what is right or wrong. It is a kind of crude apprenticeship and I say crude in sheer volume of numbers. My fantasy of Oxford and Cambridge was that there you are really taught really how to be a student because you have your individual tutor and he really helps you to learn in that way. Does that clarify Peter or do you want to ask more?

Questioner: You seem to be implying also that there is a need to have dependence rather than have people depend on oneself.

Irene: Well there is a need for inter-dependence. Now this is not specific to a University or the Open University, but for people to work together. Now for us to work together on this we were inter-dependent, we had to trust each others material. We worked together without competitiveness, saying 'what have you learned and what I've learned'. Lets chew it around, play around, lets process it now that is inter-dependence, now that is an actual model of that, this afternoon here. But inter-dependence is really a high level of sophistication and, if I can find it, I have a quote from Peter Draker about management. Peter Draker was talking about industry but he says work in organizations such as this, i.e. small groups and teams, demands above all a very great self-discipline for each member of the team. Everybody has to do the team thing and take responsibility for the entire team for its performance. Now that's inter-dependence, that's co-operation.

Question: I'm sorry to interrupt

Irene: No, go on its a very important point.

Questioner: You know when you were saying staff and normal universities put dependence into the students.

Irene: Yes.

Questioner: That's what I would like you to explain.

Irene: Well that for the most of us the idea of being dependent is abhorrent and students were clearly dependent. I mean they had no option but to get through the system. The had to be dependent on a member of staff for the content. They had to be dependent for the model to bring back the materials, so they were dependent and that was that. But in fact a few members of staff would admit that they were as dependent as students. They needed the students to give them a sense of their role, to give them a sense of what was needed to be done, to give them some sense of meaning in their work and the continual process of students passing through exams and another lot coming in the next October. There was quite a feeling, for those of you who have worked in traditional universities, I am sure you are aware of this, there was quite a feeling of renewal or, if you like, rebirth each October when the students moved back in and was stopped being empty like a one horse town in an old Western movie. And the students came back, thank God, and we started the process over again. Now you don't have that cyclical thing here so what happens to the dependence we have on other people? I mean I couldn't work as a consultant without organizations. I can't do my work as a psychoanayst without my patients. I mean there is a inter-dependence and there is a level of that which is healthy where you need each other to work to make a work alliance. Whether it is with an organization or an individual, there is a level where it is wrong. If I was needing my patients to fill in my life or my organization to fill in my life, that would be wrong. Now I'm suggesting that in a traditional university there was a level of dependence that used to irritate me that I felt the students had to carry the burdens sometimes of staff and certainly for junior members of staff. How do you cross that transition where you have been a PhD and suddenly you are a junior lecturer, its students were you. Suddenly you are up in the podium with your propers. So what happens to you when there aren't students to It's somewhere in that area. Does that make it clear? Come in if it doesn't, yes?

Questioner: Yes

Irene: Yes, come in Gordon

Gordon: I think its important to clarify between two kinds of dependency. There is what one could call an un-sophisticated immature dependency, its a sort of dependency that you can find in most industrial organizations whereby because of the technological arrangement, because of the managerial arrangements, the worker is actually made to behave at the level of a child. In other words, what is never mobilized is their adult capacity and British Managers are adapt at engineering those situations, all right. Now that kind of unsophisticated immature dependency means that the individual is always operating at a less then adult level, it also means that they operate largely at the unconscious level. Hence you will find in such situations that a cause will be found, or it may be found - the process workers at such and such a plant are being armed with ammunition, they have no way of sorting out various realities. Now the other kind of dependence that Irene is pointing to, and I think it is one of the sad things about the English language that we don't have two words to differentiate these, is a sort of reciprocal dependence, inter-dependence, or mutual dependence.

Comment: Complimentary.

Gordon: Complimentary, any of these sorts of words, some sort of symbiotic relationship. I can take in from you and you can take in from me.

Irene: In fact if I can extend on that Gordon, is it alright?

Gordon: Yes

Irene: The four years that I was at Edinburgh University coincided with the time students were allowed to come into University Committees and they were, surprise surprise, they were astonishingly inept when I went there in 73. They used to bumble through committees and upset them and goodness knows what. Not that, that was much of a tragedy, if I may say, but by the time I left it was delightful to see them really functioning alongside academics, contributing very richly from the student level and really being a voice for the students. And I was saying this to somebody recently, how rich an experience this had been to see students, yes, it was at the University of Surrey, I was there last week and to my astonishment at first and, then that's understandable, the senior member of staff said "Yes", but now they won't come to committees, they have been through that phase, you know, they have been inter-dependent and they have said stuff it. You know I am not surprised, having sat in committees where things didn't happen in a task sense. They then feel it wasn't worth being there. But that's about being inter-dependent where there was a real collaboration, where they could make their contribution in an adult fashion, to use Gordon's words, not in the roll of students that knew less. Did you want to come in Judith?

Judith: Yes. Yes I think that is fair dues, because that is about the unconscious bit, we do this.

Irene: Yes, Gordon

Gordon: I talked earlier about the inner world. We each have a representation, or object, these kind of words, previous relationships with mothers, fathers, teachers, lecturers and all sorts of things like that. Now sometimes what happens is we find ourselves in situations where there is a resonance between what is inside and what is the object outside. And I use the word resonance because I want to get the feeling of something. I used think it was perception but its actually quicker then that - 'mocking', some sort of mocking between the inner world and the outer-world. Now sometimes situations are created which lock people into their past, that would be the unsophisticated dependency, such as happens for the worker. He gets locked into and she gets locked into being in situations where all that's happening is that their past is being re-enacted all the time. Now if in fact one can, as it were, draw the boundary, the personal boundary, the ego or whatever you want to call it, then one is able to disentangle what the 'locking' is about. So in other words, if I meet you as my new boss and I had never seen you before, the chances are that I'd respond to you on the basis of all the other bosses that I had known

Comment: And your father and your mother

Gordon: But until I can disentangle the reality of you as you, and the reality I make of you, and so on, which is really why mobilising this ego-bit, or whatever you might call it, there is no possibility of disentangling. Once that is possible then it is possible to get into what Mike Hussey was calling the 'reciprocal dependence' because then one doesn't feel that one will be swamped by the other, one can actually engage right across boundaries. Does that help?

Judith: No. I think I understood what you just said but I haven't managed to make the connection between what you just said and my question. You thought, Irene, at Edinburgh certain students, you felt, were carrying too much, were being given too much dependence?

Irene: Well, unless I know, as I stand up at my podium, that I am as dependent on you, you know or whatever being there, as you are on me giving you the goods, and I'm saying you are all dependent on me. And I rather like that because I feel omnipotent and that I could do this anyway, whether you were there or not. That is what I mean by 'carrying' and too much being put on to them. And further to what Gordon was saying, I have been fascinated about that graffiti up there (on the blackboard) saying "I hate the OU, but not as much as us". Now that's Daddy or Mummy or both. I hate Mummy and Daddy but I also hate me. That is a good example of things being carried. Peter, are you with me.? That is a very relevant question and one that we are always happy to expand on because it is one of the worse sorts of 'stereo-types' that society has, that dependency on the thing that we struggle with all along to help learning of any sort, whether it is individual or group or organisational. Following on from that, if I go on with these things, so there was a, in course teams, there was a continual complaint about the lack of closeness and the build up of trust so that people could co-operate together, and also a lack of recognition of individual effort. Now I think this does vary in different disciplines. In some disciplines your effort was acknowledged by name and others its not.

Question: Before the last long discussion, apprenticing, would that be related to writing the course units, as opposed to just the behaviour of the group in a collective way? I doubt that it would be successful, because I think it presupposes the competent master. In other words, he gets to learn something that is conceding to be done effectively and done well and I don't think the OU has been going on enough to demonstrate it, by any means, that it knows how to do the job. NUPE will come into it the same old way

Comment: I think that would be very bad to try to constrain people doing it their way.

Irene: Well this was put over, actually, to me as a need for an extra time phase, where you could be openly acknowledged to learn. And it perhaps came from an interpretation of mine, and here I do go back to the course team, because it was my interpretation. I'm not betraying any confidentiality, but I am just saying that I said that I thought the course team was acting out the role of students, that they were allowing one member of staff to be the Lecturer, the Professor, or whatever, the Teacher. And they were held in a kind of passive role listening, instead of the fact that they were there with distinctive competences which they could contribute to the course team. Now right at the end it was put to me that there was a need for another bit of the time phase where you could be openly acknowledged to have a space where you learned how to operate on a course team. And I pick up the point now because it is very important. I think there is reality in what you are saying because one of the things is that three years is a long time to know how your material is developing and getting out and what the feedback is. That demands an enormous amount of tolerance of frustration because whatever any class is like at University with students there in the flesh, so to speak, you do get some feel of what is going on, you can adjust your material as you are saying it. If you are getting a terribly dead feel, it may be to do with the students, or it may be to do with how you are putting it over. You can at least ask questions and say 'are you with me?'. Anybody not understanding that and they can come back. Well there isn't that in a course team. Its going to be several years before this goes out and before there is any feedback at all. And so in terms of that, the Open University has been going a very short time indeed. I take your point, it's a very important one.

Question: I would like just to interrupt that because I would have thought most course teams do get some feedback from other academics or students who are testing draft material and looking at their plans. Perhaps not very much but...

Irene: Well, I'm not talking about my standards. I'm talking about what people said to me, that there didn't seem to be enough. I'm with you because there obviously is some feedback but it didn't seem enough for people who were perhaps fairly junior in their skills and uncertain. It was probably enough for more senior people who were fairly sure that what they were putting out was the goods.

Comment: I have a feeling that a lot of course team members are aware that financial and corporation investments were being made in what they produce which generates the anxiety, so that they actually lost, the material has gone out of their hands before they can ever get the feedback as to whether what they produce is even justified.

Irene: I think that there are two points there that tie up to what I have been saying about the time scale but I think that that was another theme that recurred again and again. Where it had been exciting in the early days it was now, there was too much energy used in a battle for resources for the course team to survive. Does that fit in with what you were saying? That the financial stringency becomes another factor, which is also reality, because most people work in this sort of way, talking about industrial metaphor 'is my product selling?' and 'can I get more resources to keep it going?'. Something that was put over very cogently was that because of the lack of recognition, you get what is called a 'bully swank' phenomenon where the most dominant member of a course team became the person who could dominate it in some way either because they really have the skills or because they have the powerful personality to do it. But also the need in course teams to maintain a visible profile because where else do you maintain it in the Open University? Who else knows how you are working? I put that as an open ended question. There was difficulty too in dealing with what was called the 'passenger' and that struck me. I remember when I went to work in University, I went from the hospital service and I remember early on thinking that University was a very tolerant society, and that people were carried in University, were absorbed and allowed to function rather inadequately in a way that they wouldn't be in a more ruthless system, where your product had to be a viable one. So there is a difficulty in course team of how you deal with passengers or people who produce less. There was also a very clear message, came over again and again, that every course team is different and operates on its own assumptions and that there was somehow a lack of any sort of general framework of looking at the framework within which course teams operate. There were also complaints about the course team not being able to work as an entity but splitting off into discreet parts with people making unilateral decisions of 'well, I'll carry on with my bit, and you carry on with yours'. And so that it seemed to me that was using the course team as a setting rather than working as a group as a dynamic of its own.

Question: Can I just come back on that? I think that that is essential, in my experience with a course group that in most cases you do have to split off into small groups. And OK, you have to come back to the course team and discuss what has happened in the small groups. But when it comes to actually getting things down on paper you have to do it in groups of two or three, and not in groups of ten.

Gordon: Well, I think that's the distinction, that I take Irene is trying to make, is the difference between splitting and delegation and there may be a hell of a difference between the two. In a sense one splits for the sake of getting primitive feeling out. There is a difference, one's unconscious and one's conscious. You know, for the sake of saying, 'for God's sake let's get this problem out' as opposed to a delegation where saying, well you handle that, that's your expertise. Yes, which is conscious, which is delegation.

Comment: I think that the big problem is when people say, 'will somebody handle that', that if it is, in fact done for special expertise or unshared information, then the people don't actually know what 'that' is. And if they don't address themselves to finding out what 'that' is before it comes back, then you can't when it comes back. And this seems to me to be a really serious problem because if you are going to make an agreement to do something jointly and you are going to share the expectation of what's coming back so that it isn't disruptive when it gets back, then it seems to me that the crucial thing is how do you talk in a course team so as to get into a situation where you can expect to have your expectations met. And it seems to me that what goes wrong in course teams is that people simply do not realise that that is their first priority, to learn how to do that and they therefore put each other into impossible situations because the 'it' that is agreed is only a verbal accident, it is not actually a meeting of minds.

Irene: Its not defined, its an assumption.

Comment: Well, its a set of assumptions. There are as many assumptions as there are people sitting round the table. Its just a form of noise, actually, words. Get it down in books and somebody agrees with such and such

Irene: So that is their own perception of what is needed. I'd like to come back to John's point because that was made to me by someone from an entirely different discipline, John. There was something, that there was a difficulty in the size of a course team and it seemed as if more than three people couldn't work together. And that is saying something about the dynamics, the course team is always larger than that. And its as if it always has to be a splitting back to the three, after the five, to work. There was a feeling of frustration about what I have said before about time, which should be used for personal research, was absorbed by the course team. And there was a feeling of scrutiny within the course team that you were exposed, but not of the team as a whole, which was said to me by several people. People don't know exactly what goes on in other course teams. And there was a feeling that criticism is taboo, that something that could be constructive and really working with the material, something I don't agree, was somehow seen as a total criticism of a total person and that therefore was very hurtful. And people would withdraw or go away and rewrite the whole thing instead of it being constructive in a way where you say 'well that part is OK but that part's not so good, can we go over that'. People would be so overwhelmed by what was said that they would go off and rewrite the whole thing and it ties up a bit to Mike's thing about they would rewrite 'it' rather than a specific bit where you could help each other. I've mentioned the struggle for resources. Well those were the comments that came over from most of the interviews and some of which you have spoken to already.

3. Environment of the OU

A.

Gordon: What I would like to do now is to look at the larger environment of the Open University. Obviously, we have been wanting to situate, and indeed the interviews enabled us to do this, to situate the course team experiences plural, in the large environment of the Open University. With hindsight, I think it is clear that the decision to focus on the course team was, in fact, the right decision because, as Irene has said, the course team is the major, in our terms, is the major through-group system of the Open University. In other words, every enterprise takes in something, transforms it in someway and puts it out. Here you have a whole series which you could build up, of course teams which do in fact, take in people. They have to take in people, meaning staff, they take in knowledge, the knowledge that you carry around in your head, and so on and so forth, and the course team offers an opportunity to transform this into something which is unknown. Sometimes it will be in something which is known and the struggle will be about how to put something out, something which is known, which has always been known, and how you work at the boundary of that and getting into the unknown. So the course team, then, is the major through-group system and, although I am not going to do this accurately, I shall develop the theme later on, but I'll fill it in now. But what has happened in the Open University is that a whole lot of other systems have grown up, in a sense to control the course team and have created a particular kind of environment. Let me try and pursue my theme through. The course team, then, is the principal transformation process of the Open University. And the other systems ie. the various committees that you have just set up, oscillate between being facilitating ie. enabling the work of the course team to go forward, they oscillate between being that and being constraining. Well, while the wish of those taking responsibility for these 'red' systems (drawn on the board) these 'macro' systems, as I shall call them, may be to actually provide conditions, facilitating conditions, they are very often experienced as being constraining by others. And we have though a lot about this. So much so that we came up with the idea, which I now want to share with you, that what has happened in the Open University is that there is, it is very difficult to create a facilitating environment for work. And what has happened is that there is going up a culture which we will simply describe as being a hampering environment. So in many/ways it seems to us, while we recognise fully, that courses are produced, lets be clear about this, courses are produced on time, for the most part - I'll add that rider - it seems to us that its done very much against a background which is very often constraining. And while the courses may satisfy all sorts of criteria which you can evaluate because you do tests with it subsequently, you question students later and so on and so forth, what we have been very very struck by is that it is at an enormous cost to the individual. So we puzzled around this and we certainly came up with the answer that the cause was not the individual. Now lets be clear about that, the cause was the environment that the individuals have collectively created, and it is very important to hold on to that distinction otherwise we can simply explain away the whole Open University in terms of idiosyncratic psychopathology which is just not on. One of the questions that we puzzled a long time around in relation to this was 'what happens to creativity in the Open University?' - its very clear that this creative work is carried on in the Open University. Even a committed non-academic like myself is impressed by watching Open University programmes because they actually lead on, and lead me on in my thinking to something fresh. I'm thinking particularly of one course which was on 'The Creative Arts and War'. They are very stimulating. They made me think about a whole lot of things. So the evidence is that creative work goes on but again we have thought, time and time again, that the creativity has to be sustained in this enormously hampering environment. We puzzled a lot around about this. Clearly, in any population such as a university, we can expect to have creative people. The reality is that you are amongst the best educated in any given population.

B.

What we are also aware of is that to be creative~ one has to have the ability to be depressed, and the two are inextricably bound up. And so we start to build up some sort of picture like this. In the environment of the Open University you are going to have people who are, because they are creative, and these people, the red ones (on the board), the creative ones hold a good deal of depression simply because of the nature of what they are into. Now in the Open University as we understand it at present, there is a good deal of denial of depression. In other words, the evidence is from the interviews that when people could talk about their feelings of the course team being essentially disappointing and bad experiences, and so on and so forth. But on the whole, as far as we understand it, this is not articulated abroad , it is held private, it is some sort of private pain which people, in fact, have to hold. Now, what really does happen of course, is that the people who cannot acknowledge their depression end up by in exactly the same process as we were talking about, dependency, end by exporting their depression to these other people who because of their particular way of operating are available for depression. And consequently what seems to happen is that these people, in actuality, get more and more and more depressed because there is no way that they can articulate the fact away. Consequently, as we understand it, the creative depression is available as some sort of container, and this is a different version of the containment that Irene was talking about, they become available to hold the depression. And consequently their creativity starts to go down, and I'll explain why in a moment. And more important, of course, these people become that little bit less creative.

Question: I'm sorry. If I can articulate that I am depressed, that makes someone else depressed?

Gordon: No, it is if you don't articulate it. What happens is that it gets projected, unconsciously, to somebody else. If I can articulate it to you ...

Irene: No, we are not articulating, we are not aware they are depressed in that particular way. To articulate is to acknowledge, to 'own' the feelings, to say I am depressed, these are MY feelings.

Question: I remember the first chance that if I don't want to say I'm depressed then I can be concerned because you were being depressed. It might not go that far but can I actually make you depressed, do you say?

Gordon: Yes.

Question: Why do you get more depressed?

Irene: The feeling of depression is around waiting to be picked up.

Question: Can we make it more, I use another means, like sitting on someone, depressive, is that part of it? Because one can think of instances not so long ago when certain people went around, and said 'and of course creative people would find that rather depressive'. Now, am I being too concrete in my example of how the greens depress the red without actually saying I'm feeling lousy today?

Gordon: Yes, I think I would accept that and be willing to go along with it.

Comment: I have become very confused, if that is the case of articulation causing depression

Irene: No, the reverse, because the shorter (course) units, or what I hear you saying, correct me if I'm wrong, you are saying about the shorter units becomes a way of curtailing creativity which leads to depression, and that is a concrete outer thing that is causing it.

Comment: I didn't understand what you said there.

Irene: There are some points in life where we get depressed, you know, where there may be some outer factor, like if you're declared redundant in your work, you're depressed and that is appropriate. I hear you saying that sometimes you were told, in effect, you are producing too much for them to curtail it. Now for whatever the reasons, that becomes a depressing feature to deal with because it is saying, what I'm giving isn't right either in quantity or whatever and I feel depressed about that. That is valid, and yet different from what we are talking about in terms of free-floating feelings. Does that make sense?

Comment: Yes. I mean I understood you to say something like those people who are trying to provide an environment that is facilitating find themselves in the position of having to depress people and those people who are providing this environment are, because they are in that position, are transferring their depression. The fact that they have to control other people, its the external environment in turn that puts them into this difficult condition, that therefore they have to depress the productive part, the creative part of the University.

Irene: I think I would want to use another word rather than depression. That is more like a constraint, I think, which could be depressing in its outcome. But my mind is going back to depression in a general way. I don't want to take this from you, but I'm thinking of the difficulty of grasping this as a concept, I'm thinking about Winnicott who was one of the most humane members of the psychoanalytic movement and he talked about the value of depression and stated quite categorically that the valuable people in this world are the people who can be depressed. Life has depressing parts to it and unless you can stay with the pain then that feeling is left floating around. A that is when we go back to Gordon's point about the 'reds' pick up the 'greens' unacknowledged depression and that to stay with depression requires a certain amount of strength because it is painful. And yet as we talk about this here, at this moment in this room, I'm sure you are all quite aware of what I am saying is quite rational. There are aspects of all our lives that are painful and depressing. That is part of life, to be able to bear that pain. But there is a bit of us that resists that always and some of us are more able to deal with it than others, the creative more than others because we get something out of the depression. Because another of Winnicott's hypotheses, which I've certainly found to be true in clinical work and personally, is that the capacity for depression means that you are integrating something and you always come out of that stronger than before. So if you are a very creative person you may have periods when you are fallow or when you think 'my God, I'll never write any thing again'. But it does pass, you become able to write and you are aware that you have somehow got something out of that phase so you can tolerate the pain of depression knowing that something good will come out of it. But if you are less creative than that, it just seems like undifferentiated pain and it is too difficult to tolerate and that is when it gets picked up by the others.

Question: The 'picking up' I have trouble with. I'm quite happy to believe, I mean I do believe that people are more depressive but this sort of hydraulic mechanism, whereby some people have wonky valves, what are your reasons for believing that this sort of transfer occurs?

Irene: Well, what are your reasons for believing it doesn't? Just reflect for a moment. I, in a very crude way, think there are some people each of you will be with who leave you feeling a bit better and a bit more full of life, perhaps a bit more optimistic. And there are some people, now I usually see it in terms of smoking and apart from other ways, there are some people I smoke more with than others, and I think that's about me being 'green' - I'm sucking at my equivalent of a baby's bottle to get some more sustenance. There are some people I don't smoke with at all because I am so engaged in what is going on and it is recharging. Now that's a transfer of feelings and lets not look at it in grandiose terms. I am sure if you go out of this room quite a lot of the relationships you have you will find that some are depleting and some are enhancing, to put it in very crude, simplistic ways. Now that's about transfer of feelings.

Gordon: I think the best example, excuse me for interrupting, is if you have been in love. That is the best example, because you are 'at one' with the other. And you know, the mother and the baby, that is a fantastic transfer of feelings - what the baby feels, the mother feels and vice versa. And then later we develop our, as it were, psychic scale, our ego, if you will. And then we are able to distinguish, I think, what is being projected into us unconsciously and to sort out what we are taking in consciously. In the final analysis I can't prove it to you and I'm not terribly fussed.

Irene: That's why it's called 'psychodynamics'. You talk about hydraulic, I mean, yes it is quite a good metaphor. But it's about some creative, some tension that goes on between people.

Gordon: You have been saying about this hampering environment, and I'll give reasons for that in a moment, but essentially what I very much want to hold on to is the notion that some people will not acknowledge their depression because that would be too painful. And let's understand this, the depression is not about being depressed as an individual but being depressed in one's role. There is a terrible difference between the two, and so much so that the phrase I've coined is 'social depression', meaning that one can be depressed in role and of course part of a person is role as well. Some people won't acknowledge this and so what they do is they project it into others who are available for it because of their particular creative potential, and so on and so forth, and what happens is that they get destroyed that little bit more. And these people here are not able to get in touch with something that would help them to be creative. The evidence is that these people, in a way, have to sometimes disappear across the boundary. (change tape)
C.
In the Open University what seems to happen is that people may come in to the environment with fairly strong egos but as they take part in this environment what has to happen is that it has to get a solid boundary around it. In other words, the defences are all put into protecting what is in the inner world. This is related very much to the fact that people can't learn from each other, that if I learned from somebody else I actually have to keep an open boundary and allow things to transact backwards and forwards across it. It seems to us that you have got an environment where the individual is left having to pour all their energies into defending their personal boundaries and so it is impossible to co-operate in the ways that we have been trying to suggest when we are talking about course teams and the discussion led into. It is impossible to co-operate in some symbolic

fashion, if you will, if I can go back to that word, and really what happened was a whole set of fragmentations - splitting and differentiation on that basis.

D.

Now the question is 'well what is the depression about?' And as we understand it at present, the depression that we are talking about is related to a certain despair in the Open University. Like any thinking and feeling sentient human being they all carry, if we are human, we all carry a certain amount of despair about the fact that we are human. The fact that we have this enormous potentiality for imagining, for feeling, for perceiving - this fantastic potentiality which we have to actually make our environment, because, I would argue you see, that everything we make in our environment, I mean here things like organisations and so on, are in fact myths and fictions, but we have this fantastic capacity to do that. One thing that always strikes me, I must slip it in here, it is only human beings who could have invented the idea of God, you know it is that one removed, a fantastic ability which human beings have. So we have this, and we have the capacity to enlarge ourselves, to acquire more experiences, to learn from our experiences, to conceptualize our experiences, to question the conceptualizations of others and their experiences - perhaps to re-work and present some sort of new sort of framework. We have got this fantastic imaginative ability and we shall die. And that is the most extraordinary thing, that we have individuality within finality because there is one thing which is true, that we shall all die. And in a way this is quite a burden that man has to carry because our hunch, our guess is that no other animal has to acknowledge the fact that they die and more important, can imagine the consequences of their dying and can imagine what will result from their death, from their leaving the world. And of course we don't even have the certainty of knowing where we are going to go. Well, we can assume that every thinking human being is carrying that kind of despair. Now here, and I have to learn from a meeting the other night, clearly I am using the word despair in, I would like to think, in a fairly rich way. I don't think despair is a bad thing. I think what is a bad thing is to deny despair because it is only through engaging despair, it is only through engaging depression that one can be creative. It is only through engaging one's despair and being human that one can, in fact, create social help. And this is the fantastic thing about being human, that we can actually create social help, we can actually generate some sort of social resurrection, if you will, during our lifetimes. So the despair, which I am trying to use in this very wide loose sort of sense, is very much around in the Open University and is related to the depression. And while we can acknowledge that there will be the despair of any ways of being human, there are certain despairs which are to do with the fact that one is in the Open University, as opposed to being with ICI, as opposed to being with the Co-operative Society or whatever it may be. And it was this that we were trying to puzzle out. Let me try to push on a little bit here, When I am talking about despair, I am talking about, I think, about the ability to engage with despair, the ability to go beyond that despair and to recognize that there is nothing, to recognize that life is based on a nothingness. And that one of the fantastic things about being human is that we actually fill that nothingness with various kinds of conceptual frameworks, beliefs, ideologies and so on and so forth. Now the important point here, is that if one can engage with despair, if one can disentangle the real nothingness which lies at the bottom of life, then one can choose what myths one is to subscribe to, and I just work on the assumption that everything is a myth. The point is to choose a myth which enables me to engage with other myths, and that is the sort of ideal description. But for the most part, what most people do is that they are terrified of this vacuum which is within them and so they fill up the vacuum with various sorts of unexamined, untested assumptions and beliefs and so on and so forth. And somehow or other that fills them out and enables them to relate, albeit in a fairly injured sort of way, with the remainder of the world. This sort of thing one can see in every enterprise, one can see it, I think, in sometimes very startling ways. Let me give one example from British industry. There is a fantastic myth in British industry that you can actually take managers and you can develop them. A lot of people make a lot of money out of this and in actuality it is all a myth because what it is about is about something else. Its about controlling people. Now what always amazes me is that people actually take part in it knowing that it is about controlling. But what else can they do, because if you want to get ahead in ICI, or whatever enterprise it happens to be, the chances are that you have to take part in the various rituals and so on and so forth, even though you do not believe in them. So it says something about how, in every enterprise, various things are put in to avoid the pain of actually having to examine the nothingness which is there. Our thought is, and this is one of our principal hypotheses, is that the despair in the Open University, aside from the ones which I have just mentioned, can be put down to far more recognizable features of life in the Open University.

E.

First of all we believe that the despair around in the Open University arises from the inability of the Open University collectively to engage with the disillusionment they feel about the failed Utopian vision of the Open University. Let me try and expand on this. Our view is that the Open University, like any innovative adventure, was a result of some sort of Utopian invisioning. To us there is nothing wrong with Utopian invisioning, provided of course one contests the realities of them. This Utopian vision seems to us to related to the fact that at the time the Open University was founded, there was very much around in British society two notions. I'm sure there were a lot of others but it is only two that we want to focus on at present - one, that the future of British society will depend on technological advancement, unless everybody is educated to the maximum potential, society will not survive. You know, that sort of arguement. There is a tremendous belief in the possibility of some future which will be based on technology. That is the first point. The second point is this, that the sociology of education, in particular, had been tremendously important in Britain led by Jean Flood and her colleagues in, I think it was the London School of Economics, in pointing out there was a correlation between social class origins and educational opportunity. And indeed at one point it seemed that that was what all that the sociology of education was about, disentangling the cause of relationships between the origins of the child, in terms of social class, which then related to language and so on and so fourth, and subsequent educational opportunities. Now in a sense the Open University, the vision of the Open University was in some ways to put this right, to somehow or other provide another chance for people. And of course this was related to the technological future of British society. Furthermore, I think that the Open University, as it were, reached into a very important root in British history which was that of the Workers Educational Association and the Working Men's Colleges and the University extension lecture, a tremendously important root of British Society. Now these, we think, were all brought together in some way, in other words, there was something about the Open University which would rectify all wrongs, that the Open University would put right certain kinds of social injustices. And at the same time the Open University, and Irene has already pointed to this, through its particular use of technology and in particular mass communication, was to bring together the best in media technology, along with all these historical roots that I have been pointing to. And in a way the Open University, as a vision, is in fact a marvellous marriage of the latest in media communication, together with something about social ideas and social justice. Our hunch is that the Open University has that kind of Utopian vision whether it was articulated or not doesn't really matter. The point is that it was there. This is our view anyway and where we are at the present time, something like a decade later, is that people have begin to realize that the Utopian vision cannot be realized and so therefore are left with something which is a disappointment, to go back to Irene's world. And I think that our view is that unless this vision can be engaged with, and people say this is where we are at now, and actually question the decison - de-cathect from the vision, mourn the fact that the vision will never be realized, it will not be possible for every single shipyard worker to have a University education - to actually work with the disillusionment of that, then the Open University, as it is at present, cannot create any sort of 'social hope'.

F.

What probably is happening is that some sort of compensatory mechanisms are being set up to deal with this. One compensatory mechanism we think is the fact that you are chasing Ph.D. students, but somehow or other you could go along this particular kind of line and we think as that was built up then that would be an avoidance of working with disillusionment about the division and so on. The other point I want to make is this. The Open University as such, its hypothesis is a threat to any other University. You may not necessarily believe this. The Open University with its unique technology and so on, the fact that the Open University has a good track record in terms of developing innovative courses, the evidence would be in the sociology of education, the whole development in the sociology of knowledge, which is primarily between Basil Bernstein in London and the Open University here, a very important movement in British thinking, that the more the Open University can be constrained from being innovative, the less chance there is that other Universities will have to change in any sort of way. In other words, if the Open University changes in its internal environment, it must cause changes in the external environment. And the pressure from the external environment is such not to allow the Open University to sustain changes. Now you may say that is a very Machiavillian hypothesis but we happen to think that it is true. Lets try it another way. The Open University, if you will, has a certain outrageous quality about it. It is so different from any other University in Britain, and that outrageous quality, either the rest of the Universities have to split off and say that's not part of our world, and one way they can do that is through manipulating the career structure, another through the economic constraints and so on, either to split it off in some way and not acknowledge it or in fact to get into some symbiotic relationship with the Open University, that there would, in fact, be the ability to learn from the Open University and vice versa. But as Irene has been pointing out earlier, it is very difficult in the Open University to actually learn from each other as individuals within it so the chances of that happening are that much more decreased. Clearly the Open University could be a radical force in society enabling people to question the cultural myths and assumptions of society. And here I thought, and you will have to help me get the evidence right, that I gather that one of the courses that caused the most trouble was a society in education course, Schooling in Society, sorry., and it may just be that the Schooling and Society course was trying to attract more than its fair share of flack because, in fact, it might have been questioning cultural myths and assumptions in a larger society. So clearly what we are suggesting, that it is to some sort of innovative posture, which in fact the Open University has to return and, in fact, you could take up this posture again. Then it would enable Universities to be questioning what it is that they are teaching, all sorts of knowledge to be questioned because you have a demonstrative capacity to do that. And I think bringing it out in a larger way, to question what is going on in society at large, and this of course is the fantastic potential of the Open University, that in fact in everybody's living room, so to speak, it would be possible for people to be inducted into ways of thinking and into ideas which would cause them to go out and question what it is to work. OK, I've taken a very simple example, but I think that that is a possibility. As it is, and Irene pointed to this, its been impossible to work through the disillusionment, right, to acknowledge that disillusionment to get in touch with the despair around. And because it is not possible to work with that disillusionment, and therefore to create something afresh in relation to the environment, that it actually is at the present time, is has meant, as we see it, that individuals start to get depressed in various sorts of way. Some people will not acknowledge their depression. They project it into this lot available for depression. They are usually the creative people and they get that much more hampered and because you have not got a system whereby you can learn from each other, then these people here, they're that much more hampered as well. The second reason for the despair which we think is around, Irene has already mentioned but let me elaborate a bit further. The staff of the Open University work with a particular constraint, and the point is that this constraint hasn't been able to have been worked through and so it is impossible to create something afresh. In particular, the constraint the Open University works with is that they suffer from what one of you very well put, 'we suffer from the sensory deprivation of not having students'. This has important implications. It means that younger staff have no student body with which to work out their role and there is no way in which their transference feelings, their feelings about authority can be worked out. There is no population to work it out on. And so if younger staff cannot find their role as teachers, others more senior in the establishment too could make different kinds of roles from that which they had at present, because our hunch is that what is happening, and Irene has said this, that senior people came in but they already had the experience inside them, that they had already internalized in other educational institutions about what it is to be a teacher, what it was to be somebody who was to make knowledge, if you will, to press it to its furthermost limits. So they have that but there is no way that younger people can work it out around them. Overall, I think that what we are saying is this, is that the culture of the Open University is one to deny despair of the failed vision, and the fact that there are no students in the conventional sense, what is very clear to us is that it is very difficult for people to establish mutual and reciprocal work relationships. If you will, the symbiosis of relationships that allow people to grow appears to be lacking and this is not to say that there aren't systems operating, networks in particular and there is one that we know of operates in IET where you actually get somebody who has sufficient individual strength, which they have taken from the outside work, to be able, as it were, to be a 'nodule' in some sort of network, and people related around that in various kinds of ways. But that, in a sense sometimes enables the work to be done but very often is some sort of compensatory mechanism. Overall we think there is a great anxiety about integration in the Open University. In other works, there is a fear of integration. Let me see if I can try and get this right, that because the environment is hampering and, as it were, picks up certain destructive things from the environment, certain sorts of bad features from the environment, that the individual is left having, as I have put it before, to get a very tight boundary around themselves. And the more tight the boundary is the more is being defended what is inside. What is inside is being defended is being good and precious and marvellous and must not be shared in any sort of way. So the whole focus is upon keeping that boundary well solidified. When people go into a situation where, in fact, they have to open these boundaries in various way such as about new ideas, and a course team or something like that, it's impossible for them to do that because the anxiety is that all the boundaries will disappear altogether and there'll be complete disintegration and the individual will be left with some kind of nothingness. And that is our thought about the integration disintegration scheme. But we will be happy to elaborate on this in the questioning.

G.

Now I just want to make one more point which is this. As we see it the course team is the major throughput system of the Open University. What seems to have happened in the past is that course teams have failed to produce things in time and have put in unrealistic demands for 20,000 lasers, or something like this. And in other words, in the course team the experience seem to have been that people have not been able to manage themselves in their roles of participants in the course team. And what has also happened is that the proper managerial boundary to the course teams has very often been very badly managed. Either, as Irene put it, there was nothing or there in fact was some super-ordinary control. Now, in consequence, what seems to have happened is that other systems have grown up, and you can name these as committees which in a sense controls the course team in various ways. The simplest form of control is through the manipulation of time and it is very interesting that in the Open University time is not actually allowing some sort of space in which something can happen but time is used as some sort of constraining factor to cut off space, to curtail it to press it back. And that is one simple way in which control gets exercised. The other simple ways are through finances, and so on the so forth. Now clearly, there has to be reality about finances, that its experienced very much as control. What I think we are struck by is that, as opposed to a picture that we might carry in our heads, of systems relating to systems, as it were of one plane, so to speak. Now what seems to have happened in the Open University is some sort of hierarchy of systems. One system on top of another system, on top of another system, on top of another system. And in that sort of picture the individual becomes bottom of the system, whereas we would like to see a picture where that might be an individual, as a system, relating to a course team as a system. You know, moving in backwards and forwards and relating to other systems and so on. So there is a hierarchy of systems. Essentially, I think, if you were to put some sort of word on it, we see the Open University as generating some sort of coercive compliance, that somehow or other the Open University in committee structures and so on, is very often experienced as punitive and bringing about some sort of compliance on the part of individuals. Consequently, people then get frightened and why not, I would do the same, they get more and more frightened and what the system will do to them, the system will take them over in some sort of way, and so they either export themselves across the boundary, by not turning up for a few months, or they go off to the medical services or in fact, they just try and struggle on - which I guess most of you are trying to do. But it is a massively collusive process between the individual and their inner worlds and the environment that they create around them which, in turn, they introject back again - that, for various reasons, the individual projects out certain anxieties about losing their personal boundaries, and reciprocating creates certain kinds of systems which are then internalised back the way. And so it becomes a mutually collusive destructive process.

Question: You have drawn this diagram several times and I like them. It seems to me there is something really crucial that doesn't show up in them, but which is there, in a sense. And that is that when you say that we are going to take the Open University as an outer environment and you draw a big boundary and you then go and draw little boundaries inside to represent people. And when you draw one boundary to represent one person the rest of what's inside the Open University circle is their environment but it's the other people, each person is part of the others' environment. And there is invariance of origin if you pick up the whole pattern and move it round so that you drop them down on somebody else, you tend to get the same, it floats.

Gordon: I think the words I would put for myself is that what happens is that what's inside all these individuals, only certain aspects get called out. Right?

Question: The organisation concerned that because of the ritual, I mean the ritual is there because the behaviour becomes stereo-typed, in so far as the individuals fall into stereo-type grouping, largely by imitation, by auto-segregation and what not, then it doesn't tend to matter very much. I mean, of course, if you look at it, it depends on the mode of resolution that you look at in. If you are looking at a particular person and their particular problems then their particularities distinguish them. But this actually generalises so, consequently, when one draws this, then the boundaries should not really be taken to representing particular individuals because all the other individuals in the environment, that one, and so you shift your attention to another one, the one you were looking at before it becomes part of the environment.

Gordon: But in a way, what we are doing is that we are resonating at an unconscious level and so the adult bit that hasn't got mobilized or gets pushed into just a few people - obviously we are painting a very black and white picture, there is some more to it. Can I just correct that, its not a caricature.

Irene: I would refute that. I think it is that you have to focus over, in over exaggerated fashion for the sake of clarification. Its the reality, its just a question of degree.

Comment: Yes when you look at it you can either see the lines, or actually in your minds eye, you can see all the fuzziness and all the relations underneath.

H.

Gordon: Irene mentioned the idea of the technology of the Open University, and I talked a little bit more about that, I think that for us our sort of breakthrough came in understanding the Open University which may be we understood a few days ago, we may not understand by the end of this afternoon, was that the metaphor, the organising metaphor of the Open University is a technological one, that the reality is that you use certain kinds of technology. The example I gave about the control systems being set up are in fact modelled on the sort of things you might get in an operational thinking establishment and some of you have talked about this , and this is where we base our evidence on, and that the technological metaphor, the idea of time being used in certain kinds of ways and so on, the sheer constraints of having to present material within, you know, which can be fitted onto a screen so to speak and in a particular kind of frame, and I'm using that in some sort of loose sense, has meant that over a period of time that the only control systems which could go out were in fact the technological controls. So the technological metaphor has taken over life and consequently individuals feel all the time that this metaphor is confusing their lives, confusing their inner worlds. And the only way that people can, as it were, react, and hold on to something about themselves, is to react against the technological metaphor and this may be to act-out in terms of not putting things in time or in fact to split them off in various sorts of ways.

I.

And if we would summarise all our work here it would be that, if we could continue to work with you, it would be suggesting and trying to create with you some sort of what we simply call an ontological metaphor. In other words, some sort of different metaphor of being and in thinking around this. The ingredients of this ontological metaphor would be of trying to make space within the Open University, by this we mean psychic space, space on the heads, so to speak, some sort of space in which to be creative. In other words, some sort of space in which the depression and despair could come forward and be worked with without converting each other into patients or anything stupid like that, but actually recognizing the despair of a human condition - I'm not sick because I'm despairing, I'm not sick because I'm depressive - but actually being able to work at these sorts of things which is despair about what the Open University might be able to do. And that I think what we think would mobilize a good deal more of the creativity which is in fact around in the establishment and we would expect this to be around in an establishment like this. So it would be something about making some sort of space in which people could be creative, and if you will, to use Irene's words, which she used the other night, I don't think she used it today, was a national space in which people could play, in some sort of positive sense. We are not asking you to go away and make sand piles or something like that but to play with your heads, and to play with ideas. As it is, we think, and this is our perception and we have done a lot of disentangling as to whether it is what we carried inside ourselves, or whether it was projected into us, is that the Open University is really experienced as more of a void, more of a nothingness. And in a sense it is a void in which idealism gets crushed, various sorts of idealism gets crushed. People then respond to this by trying to mobilize some kind of ideology. It might be Marxist one or a Christian one, all sorts of ideologies, or encounter groups or something like that. And what we do find here is that it is very difficult to disentangle the boundary of the limits, let me use that word, between destructiveness and creativity, and the two are intimately bound up. To be creative, one is destructive, one is pushing things to its limit but here what very often happens is that the potential constructiveness gets distorted all the time into destructiveness. As we pointed out on the blackboard, the Open University is a bad object and so a lot of feelings in the Open University go into the individual trying to survive in what appears to be some sort of bad environment, some sort of hampering environment. This is related to the fact that there is no, or little containment in the Open University. That is to say there are no traditional structures. That doesn't mean to say one wants to put in traditional structures. The problem is to find structures which will enable people to continue to work. And so if people are in a void and feel themselves to be in a void, the energy of the individual has to go into the sabotaging of that environment because that is the only way the individual can survive. I think that where we are is sort of saying to you that if we can only find what we call an ontological metaphor, if we could only find a metaphor that would enable people in the Open University to take up their roles and to engage with their feelings, that in fact the Open University might generate some sort of facilitating environment as opposed to a hampering environment which it appears to have at the present time. Well let me stop there, I'm aware that there is a good deal more material, but lets just stop there because we don't have to cover everything this afternoon.

4. Concluding discussion

Question: I'd like to externalize my despair that I'm experiencing at the moment, that I have a right to explore the implications of some of these things at some length because I feel that I can't encompass. I don't know if there is any way around that, but I'm very saturated as far as thinking about is concerned. Is there any, what is there a picture of or a discussion of, are we able to meet again? I greatly enjoy coming to a meeting with you to express your despairs in front of a lot of people

Robert: I think the answer to that is that we are negotiating to get some more funds for at least four more meetings. But this has to be done with IET as plans with Gordon and I are mainly to see what their time is and what they want to commit themselves to. Certainly this is very much something I have been working on for the past month but we have to wait at this point to see what the interest was and to see where we might get in the end.

Irene: I think its a very relevant question, Andy, if I can illustrate what we have been saying . I can contain my despair if I know there is a container going to come up, and there is sometime when I can work it through, where we can process it together. Which is exactly what consultancy is about to a certain extent. It doesn't only happen to consultants but that can be one more of an aiding environment, that we can be there in a transition way, that's the traditional containment.

Comment: Personally I feel the need to take this away in print. You are producing a written report. Always at this stage in any sort of thing like this, I always feel the need to go away and contemplate and think about it on my own, and weigh these things up with relative calm, as an individual. I think that is the sort of next stage I would feel I need to do before I really start to discuss what or even take the feedback.

Brian: I think that is a reasonable kind of reaction. I can see the presentation to be incredibly rich, incredibly provocative. I find myself mentally disagreing with a lot of it, doesn't resonate with a lot of my experience, and I think the thing to do is to look at the transcript of it and to make it available. It offers new way of looking at these problems. I would be grateful that it could not actually be right.

Gordon: It doesn't really matter if we are right or wrong, it doesn't fuss me and it doesn't fuss Irene. I think that the important thing is, and this is where I do disagree, I don't think it comes through really, I think it actually would come through what Andy Northedge was trying to point to was, will we actually disentangle, and people saying to us 'well look, you have got the evidence wrong, from where I sit, from my experiences I can give you this hypothesis'. That seems to me, its in that space between us that the work gets done.

Question: It seems to me, I feel that I am pretty happy with what you have been saying myself because with anything formally, the fact that it fits doesn't mean it gives a cover to things that are before my mind. But on the other hand, the time that I run up the wall and when I'm not is when I see something which seems to me is the suggestion of a specific and false explanation where I could see some reason for regarding if its false, and where a coherence to such a false explanation will actually waste time in getting back to the, whatever it is that has been falsely explained, because if we are proceeding under some kind of misapprehension, the object is to get rid of this misapprehension. And if one believes to have done so and one hasn't then one is in a worse case than otherwise. It seems to me that if I were to interpret what you were saying, you were saying it doesn't really matter if you were right or wrong as long as we should talk with each other, without shutting off each others comment.

Irene: This is the ontological bit as you introduce it, the technological bit. I was thinking a few thoughts while Gordon was speaking. I'd like to come back to the relevance of having this afternoon. If I may, John, using this as maybe an observation, I think your remarks about my not coming in early enough as a consultant was a good example of a wishful dependence without that being conscious. I think you were also expressing disillusion, which for my money is fair enough, but I think with my being here allows that to happen. And its this kind of thing that can't go on in the Open University. In effect, it was saying 'I hoped for something else, I didn't get it'. Now some of that may be realistic and maybe I did fail you, some of it may be that your expectations were too high.

John: Possibly, I mean I think you could have this both ways round expecting us to do the work.

Gordon: I think it would be quite important to elaborate a little bit more on what's being said. You see there are various ways that we can be a consultant. The way to make the most money being a consultant is to go in there and make them depend on you. Its very straight forward, its very easy to do. But I think that where we are at is to say what people do must be under authority. And that means, in a way, having to sit on what one's perceptions sometimes are of the situation and so on, because I think when I work a lot in industry I find the more I can hold on and just be in the room, thinking and puzzling out all the time possibly making an interpretation as to what's going on, the more I help them to take responsibility for their internal environment and the external environment of which they are working in. But I think it is the only way, and I am convinced about this, it's the only way whereby I can help people to move from the immature and unsophisticated dependence through to some sort of mutual dependency. The reality is that consultants are dependent upon their clients and it is something about working towards that.

Irene: Certainly I can tell you which is the most uncomfortable was to do what I did and sit tight with questions inside and wait forever just to check up before I said anything. I mean, it would have been far easier just to come in and bang, bang bang and make statements that were my perceptions

John: I mean I wasn't asking you to make statements. I was asking you to ask questions. For instance, I mean it took a long time before I even began to puzzle out what you are trying to do. It wasn't at all clear for a long time whether you were really supposed to be there to actually help the course team or whether you were there to help possibly by some future course team reflecting on what's happening. It all seems to be very, very vague. It seems very much of a song and dance. But even when I did, I didn't seem to get an answer. I think my feelings are in accord with the evidence of course team's.

Irene: Are you sure?

John: Well if we felt it we would probably have had to respond. I think we are both very busy, we have a lot on our minds and therefore we weren't able to.

Irene: To bear our perceptions, that is what I meant by lack of space. I didn't think there was enough space to come in.

John: But I think you should be the one to make the space.

Irene: Well, possibly. I think that is a kind of paradox to make space in a sense.

John: But I think if you say, to look retrospectively, perhaps you could have suggested the setting of half an hour of time to discuss what you could do for us. I mean, its a thing you could have done, and you'd say, I should have done that, and it is true I should have done that, looking back, I should certainly have done that. But I didn't. And you are the experts, I feel it should have come from you to suggest it.

Question: we are talking about how it goes wrong but I don't understand how it went wrong.

John: Well, I don't actually know what went wrong in that sense.

Irene: Who says it went wrong?

John: Ok, let's try to represent the way it went wrong - what things didn't happen that could have happened, those things didn't happen, that didn't start happening and they maybe could have started happening earlier

Comment: That is the story of the Open University.

Irene: You didn't trust me enough to ask questions.

John: No. I don't think that is true. I don't think it's any matter of trust at all.

Question: One thing, the course team themselves, was really the people who were totally new to the OU system, all feeling that way?

Irene: Yes, the atmosphere changed very much. They said couldn't we have got to know each other.

John: I'd just come back on what you just said. You said we didn't trust you and I think that is actually a complete total misrepresentation. I don't think there is any question of lack of, or unwillingness to talk. You certainly didn't trust me.

Irene: Yes, but I think you have taken this out of context. If you trust yourself you will trust others, if what on earth stops you asking questions and just sort of being curious.

John: Our attention is directed to other things.

Irene: Yes, at a rational level, yes.

John: Even after our talk to you, I am still actually having difficulty in it. Somehow you did seem very reluctant to actually tell us what you are doing. That is the way it seems to us, to a certain extent.

Comment: I've been at the OU for about three or four years and the first thing that struck me about the OU is that you can never get anybody to tell you anything but, except for one thing, will always say 'I can't do that or I can't tell you that, or I can't explain that but do please come back and ask my anything else that you want to know'.

Irene: Well, in that case I was probably acting out for the group.

Brian: Is there any reason why you talk about making space rather than making time?

Irene: Yes, because I see space has an emotional connotation and time is a different dimension. Space includes time but time doesn't necessarily include the emotional space that I'm talking about. There was pressure and anxiety for reasons that Phil has outlined among other things, about new groups, there is a very sharp focus on the task, for reasons that you all know, and people were anxious and among seven new members I was yet another new member, so that there wasn't a kind of emotional space. If I go in and think they are a very cohesive group, there would have been some sort of curiosity and availability of saying, well 'who are you are what are you about?'

Question: Does space also mean permission to make mistakes?

Irene: Yes, certainly, that is why we play. I think that this is something about you are not in, because I think this is another thing that has come out. There are one or two things that I haven't mentioned about the course team that, one of the things that came up very strongly is the competitiveness that is here, that was put along side the thing, elitism. That although elitism wasn't there with Open University staff, competitiveness certainly was - and that is any university staff. It is a highly competitive society and that is never really articulated to students either. Its a highly stressful, competitive society. Now competitiveness doesn't allow space because playing is about, it doesn't matter whether I am right or you are wrong, it's not about right or wrong, it's just about let's play with ideas and let's see what comes out. It's about creativity and so space, yes, allows you to be right or wrong but it doesn't matter, you are not in it for that business.

Comment: We are in a society that seems to think the competitiveness produces things and therefore it says that competitiveness equates creativity.

Irene: Well, is production creative? I pick up your point. I think the Open University is reflecting a lot of what goes on in the society. I think this is a microcosm but I don't think this is the point because there is so much dissatisfaction, no matter how contained it is. This is why you don't get motivation with money, it's not about money. People want satisfaction and until you get an element of play and creativity in your work, you are not going to get satisfaction, and it's because it becomes so competitive that you don't get that in your work.

Gordon: I sometimes think that competitivenes is one of the enterprises which generate competitiveness, actually are able to control creativity, meanwhile saying the opposite, because if I am competitive with you it has got to be in a delimited area. If we are creative we don't know where its going to be. But if it can be made competitive and constrained, then the control can be exercised at a subliminal level almost.

Robert: Could I draw the formal aspect of this closed because you have an opportunity, if you can stick around, for tea and sherry over in the Private Dining Room which is laid on and ready. You can talk individually with Gordon and Irene amongst yourselves so it has not ended really, we are just going to change the format. I'd like to say I have found it very stimulating and I wish that more of our colleagues could have shared this personal experience because I find it much more helpful to understanding. But I think also that the written material will be available in about a month, which will also be useful, and I appreciated, John, your comments because to me it suggests that the expectations of this were discussed often and may be of value and use to us. Thank you.

Participants

Technology Course team - John Dixon, Phil Richards, Dudley Thompson, Tony Bright, Mike Hussey (OU members not attending - J. Cannell, I. Stevenson, D. Hurtley, R. Gibson, M. Stewart - course coordinator)

IET steering group - Pete Davey, Brian Lewis, Judith Riley, Robert Nicodemus, Andy Northedge, Bob Zimmer

Jack Field, Tim O'Shea(IET), John Oates, Martin Hammersley (Educational Studies), Peter (a graduate student)

Chris Row, Peter Guilford (Personnel), Anne Marvin (nurse)

Teaching and Consultancy Centre

Report No 76

Open University staff reactions to the Tavistock report

by Robert Nicodemus

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Institute of Educational Technology
The Open University, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA

The **Teaching and Consultancy Centre** is part of the Open University's Institute of Educational Technology.

Its aims are:

1. **To help improve student learning** in the University by advising and assisting Faculties, Schools, Continuing Education, University Committees and groups, as appropriate. A chief concern is the accessibility and teaching effectiveness of course materials, to which the Centre contributes through its work on course teams: through research; course planning, policy making and working methods; critical reading of draft materials, and the evaluation of courses.

2. To maintain a knowledge base for the above activities by helping to research problems in the OU learning system and by recording experience in course teams and on committees, and also to encourage innovatory solutions and practices.

3. To provide consultancy and training, inside the OU and on a contract basis with outside organisations, based on the staff's wide experience in distance education and open learning. On this same basis, to chair course teams and write course materials, and to 'transform' materials produced by external contributors into high quality distance teaching material.

FOREWORD

Twenty six OU staff were interviewed concerning their opinions about the written report - 'The Open University' - from Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (TIHR) consultants. Substantial notes from the interviews are included in this monograph plus four written contributions from OU staff. A preliminary verbal report presented six months earlier by the TIHR consultants is discussed in TCC report No 75 'The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations consultancy in the Open University'.

OPEN UNIVERSITY STAFF REACTIONS TO THE TAVISTOCK REPORT

Introduction

In 1978 IET sponsored an enquiry by consultants from the TIHR into the experience of working in and with course teams for the purpose of opening up a wider discussion and possible further enquiries. The preliminary verbal report presented in February 1979 was not controversial at the time but the written report distributed six months later evoked considerable controversy and some of the reasons for this are considered in this monograph.

A summary of the TIHR enquiry is in TCC report No 66 'Reflections on the Tavistock report thirteen years on' and the written report - 'The Open University' (TIHR Doc. No 2T-271, 1979) - is included in the report.

Context of the Tavistock report

Within the limitation of resources available, fifty staff were interviewed by the consultants and a course team observed for a few months. From this data the consultants attempted to make sense of the institutional environment in terms of the 'inner' realities of the staff interviewed, course team behaviour and the relationships between staff and consultants. They attempted to place the OU within the context of time, contrasting the beginnings in 1969 with the present ten years later. In this they made some guesses which were partly right but which also did not account for some of the realities of the OU and the omissions were criticised in nearly all of the staff responses included here. However, nearly all of the staff recognized the importance of the enquiry, the validity and importance of many of the consultant's observations and the need for further enquiries.

Because the TIHR consultants drew upon a psychoanalytic model for understanding the relationship between individual behaviour and institutional structure, they were particularly sensitive to defenses against anxiety. Evidence of defensive behaviour includes attempts to isolate one's self from - 1) the environment - the give and take of relationships, 2) a sense of responsibility for what happens, 3) memory about the past 4) an awareness of 'inner' reality (emotions and capabilities) and links with 'outer' reality. Psychoanalytic theory uses a rather technical language to describe the processes of defense and this plus the anxieties stirred up by the subject initially pose severe difficulties for understanding.

In my opinion, in an effort to avoid creating a dependency relationships between 'clients' who are struggling to learn and consultants as the 'experts', the emphasis of TIHR consultancy (or 'process' consultancy) is on the management of one's self rather than managing others. I think the two Tavi consultants, Gordon and Irene, saw omnipotence as a basic feature of defensive behaviour which is driven by anxiety. But they were very different in how they saw omnipotent behaviour relative to the OU because of their different work and interests in the OU. Gordon is an organizational consultant who attempted to make sense of the relationship of the institution to the broader environment but this also includes all other levels - intra-psychic, inter-personal and inter-group. Irene is a psychotherapist who works primarily at the level of the 'patient-therapist' interface which does not exclude the environment, contrary to some critics of psychoanalysis.

As a result, the written Tavistock report has some qualities which some staff found rather hard to take. For the consultants, the idea in management of controlling others may seem rather omnipotent, offensive and immoral. Thus the consultants are particularly critical of a 'technological' orientation which neglects emotions and the process of learning. In the verbal report six months earlier Gordon found it necessary to remind us that we were mortal, that we die and are not omnipotent. In contrast, Irene may seem more concerned about teams getting stuck in a repetitive cycle of defensive behaviour and may have neglected the relationship between defenses and learning. Unfortunately she observed a team which was near the end of preparation (in the middle of hand-over) and did not see much of the team's development. Although I attempted to obtain a representative sample of staff based in the centre (Walton Hall), I neglected the regions and activities there, especially the summer schools, all of which contribute to the 'containment' of anxieties.

Given the partial data which the consultant's had access to as well as the limited time available, their report could be easily criticised for being incomplete or distorted. However, staff mostly recognized what was important about the report and added to it by their comments which are included in the appendix.

Main points in the Tavistock report

The consultants saw the OU as an institution created with an idealistic view of the future in which the educational inequalities created by class differences would be corrected through unrestricted or 'open' access to a university education, taught with an emphasis on new technologies. Now, after ten years they guessed that we were reaching some mid-life crisis and realizing that the ideals could not be attained. This sense of failure was combined with a failure of relationships which they saw and heard about in course teams i.e. where there is no space provided to think about all the different experiences people had and how to make them better. This combination of apparent failures may account for the consultant's use of 'despair' to describe the situation, a word which gave many staff difficulties

In response to despair, staff turn away from painful experiences, especially those about destructiveness 'within' and never have a chance to modify their views or for creativity to emerge out of the depressive feelings. In psychoanalytic theory creativity develops out of feelings about reparation and this, in turn, is only possible when all feelings have been contained in one place - in an individual or team. The distance teaching system we have created appears to function well in supporting student learning and creativity but at an unacknowledged cost to individual staff.

Because we become locked into a defensive posture, boundaries between one's self and others are fragile and, consequently, any criticism of work is taken very personally - that the whole person is felt to be criticised. We turn away from these bad experiences and prefer to create courses which are totally new rather than improve on the old and this unconscious process puts IET collectively into a difficult position. To survive, IET staff work individually and it is difficult to get a collective sense of what IET adds up to. Some IET staff seem to fulfil a prophesy of 'failure' by their criticism of IET and this reflects the failure of trust and recognition of expertise one may see in the highly competitive atmosphere of course teams. Thus, IET has become a focus of disappointment as well as a container of depressive anxieties which makes it difficult to function at the boundaries with the rest of the OU e.g. it is difficult to find out what is going on or communicate it to anyone outside.

Reactions of OU staff provide a useful catalogue of other experiences which are important in institutional life and I will consider them in the following section. Most staff did not believe that the situation was as bleak as the consultants painted it. For example, IET has continued to function and has now provided a framework (psychodynamic based) for understanding experiences in course teams and any other kind of team for that matter. Although it may be difficult for staff to learn from this model, IET has nevertheless provided a container for anxieties which have also subjected it to severe criticism as well as controversy. But this criticism is at least for doing something rather than not being seen to do anything worthwhile collectively.

I classified the interviews according to their agreement with the report -
A. Mostly agree with the report but with some modifications - 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 ,8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18
B. Find it some of it useful but with major modifications - 7, 25
D. Mostly disagree - 9, 15

It is interesting that the strongest disagreement were expressed in a group situation (15) where regional staff discussed my summary of the report. The report's 'metaphoric' language was not found to be helpful and one found it 'sloppy' i.e. encouraging an idealized view of teaching

Other aspects of team work
Through the interviews in the Appendix, OU staff provide a comprehensive list of influences on course team work which is summarized below (including examples of comments). One underlying anxiety appears to concern excessive control from outside and the difficulty of developing one's own authority (management inside), especially given the lack of opportunity to work at teacher-student relationships and roles.

1. Society - OU caters mostly for people who have had a successful experience of education.

2. Other institutions - criticism of peers in other institutions, external examiner reports.

3. Institutional - complexity, failure to adapt procedures to individual situation, defenses in the institution, negative attitude in committees, demands of schedules and lack of time, management taking a hard line about order and procedure, there are good reasons for staff working at home, too much pursuit of knowledge with neglect of responsibility for the institution and what it needs, Walton Hall is seen as a computer, one feels like a small cog in a big wheel.

4. Leadership - insensitive leaders who 'turn off' teams members e.g. hardliners not believing the Tavistock report, complexity of managing 18 courses through production is not sufficiently recognized, difficulty of managing traditional staff in an un-traditional situation, management by crisis predominates.

5. Communication - PVCs should improve, all staff do not come together at one time as at the beginning of term, the idea of 'instrumental' relationships makes sense.

6. Inter-personal - academic competition, bad at coping with conflicting ideas, seeing only the intellectual aspects and not the emotional, fight for resources, do not get to know colleagues well, unprofessional behaviour, lack of empathy, work collectively in a loose structure.

7. Course teams - neglect stages in life of course team, younger staff less prepared for 'cut and thrust' of course team life, frustration at having to take over work which others have not done, no counselling available for personal crises, course teams are demoralizing, there is a lot of learning in course teams, too negative - most people do not find course teams punitive, it is not something awful.

8. Content/teaching - disagreement about how to teach, courses are produced to a specification which is not creative.

9. Students - isolation from students.

10. IET - has failed to provide 'tool-kits' for practical help.

11. Tavistock - people expected to talk only about problems to TIHR consultants, consultants were too gentle but at least they took personal needs seriously, the word despair is an overstatement - an emotional self indulgence, there is no shared vision among OU staff, the report is too sophisticated, a lot of it rings true, 'institutional depression' is not easily understood, there is an absence of anything specific about what to do, should look at the Production Methods Committee's ten reasons for lateness in schedules.

A technological view

The consultants view the 'promise' of technology as one which is - 1. clear 2. rational and 3. controlled. A danger in this emphasis is to neglect the emergent, emotional and spontaneous aspects of learning and limit us to 'instrumental' values where there is no room for error or feelings and all behaviour is predetermined. A more 'spiritual' view would have room for both idealization and denigration (love and hate), belief in one's own creative capabilities (along with possible failure or loss) and faith that (faced with the unknown and unknowable) difficulties may still lead to something better.

Such stereotypes have a long history in the literature of change as well as war. The imposition of a 'mechanism' versus a more 'organic' approach has inspired many conflicts and academic papers which are not unique to the present. Technology used inflexibly provides another metaphor for defensive behaviours - fear is made safe by not seeing and mortals are made into machines, immortal and immoral for fear of working in a 'machine-like' or computer dominated environment. Out of the dynamics within the structures which groups manufacture (Gordon referred to these as untested assumptions), individual creativity emerges (along with the myths that sustain groups).

Appendix. Summary of follow-up interviews

The style of reporting these interviews varies and the staff responsible for them were - Robert Nicodemus, Bob Zimmer, Pete Davey and Judith Riley. Interviews were open-ended and our summaries, sent to the interview for correction, are included below.
'CT' refers to course team and CTC to course team chairmen.

Interview 1

You will probably get two responses to the report. One group of hard-liners will not believe it, the other group will have difficulty coming to terms with it. Personnel ought to be interested in it and the implications for training but they have probably had their fingers burnt from the contact with the academic area.

Some CT chairmen are sensitive to interpersonal relations, intuitively creating an environment in which people flourish. They have probably not read how to do this or gone on a course on how to manage. They would probably be aghast at the suggestion that a book or course would help and view it as unethical.

Other CT chairmen are not so sensitive and help create a problem situation in which individual CT members are turned off, there are probably three courses in this category compared to every one which works well.

There is a vicious circle in which the institution reacts to turned-off individuals by taking a harder, more bureaucratic line. Rather than playing on available energy and sympathy, it orders them by procedures and creates, less and less the right working environment. It becomes more like a factory. There is probably an effect of so many new staff recruited in 74/75 who are involved with most course teams now.

Interview 2

There are other aspects of difficulty in course teams which are more important. First is the complexity of the system including resources, planning and other things pushed on to the team - more so now than in the first year or two. There is also intense competition for limited resources.

Another aspect is the different approaches to a discipline and how to teach it. You inevitably get conflicts. The report is too vague. It is not good enough to say that "people report" their experiences.

Most people do not find course teams a punitive or destructive environment. There are not more than a half dozen people in the faculty who would fit the description given in the Report.

There is a sense in which people are not prepared to come up against the new problems found here. They may be hurt by criticism. If one can work out procedures which help problems - well and good. But the question of neutral criticism is a problem. There is too little 'friendly' criticism and discussion.

There is also a problem with time, especially in multi-disciplinary courses. There may be insufficient time for agreed methods or an unwillingness to see the problem on an intellectual rather than emotional basis. We are bad at coping with conflict of ideas. In other universities the problem is avoided by people getting on with doing their own thing. To try to be rational in course teams may create new problems. It is not a problem of 'ego' or 'id' but of a society in which the idea of "liberal" covers a lot of intellectual assumptions.

Some staff may have an extreme idealized view of the OU in which they are disappointed but I would query this view of reality. Life is a process of coming to terms with reality - it is not something awful.

An early view of the OU was a hard-headed political view to produce more technocrats for society. Some students may consolidate their careers but this is not true of all. There is an equal number with little idea of their career. None of these students are disillusioned. You only have to go to summer school to see how stimulated they are.

Certainly fictions and myths play an important part in life but they are not a basic thing about life. Such a view rather precludes making helpful statements. The metaphoric language seems not helpful or fruitful. Even worse, it has the effect (if any at all) of encouraging a sloppy, idealized view of teaching amongst a minority of staff without producing the where-with-all to deal with real problems.

The report sees the reality of the university almost entirely in terms of satisfaction and feelings. This is too negative and leaves the real problem unscathed. One does not get to know people well here.

Most people know what hard work course teams are - especially for the chairman. Something ought to be done about it. Some of the obvious solutions seem to make the problem worse - by increasing the technological aspects. We then need more administrators and statisticians. But how to run it without specialized areas such as operations, media, PVC and so on?

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Problems are centred at the moment around the Planning Board. Halving the number of courses we are producing might help with some of the impossible problems. But it might make them worse with too much time to battle out disagreements.

Interview 3

A lot of what the report says rings true. The experience of a course team chairman changing a unit could lead the unit author to feel that what emerges is not his unit with a resultant lessening of commitment and arousing of antagonisms. The OU appears to recruit younger staff who may be less prepared for the open cut and trust of course team life although more mature people with a thicker skin would be better able to cope. The academic world is a tough place to normally work in and even tougher in the OU. Given the way CTs work, some problems could be avoided by new staff being educated into what to expect in a CT, and therefore be psychologically better prepared. Although CT members need to be independent minded, there is need for them also to realise that the course is a group effort, and that the purpose is education of students and not the enhancing of an individual's reputation (that may occur incidentally in a course: it should occur primarily in research output).

Several years ago there was a lot of antagonism between academics and the administration about production 'crisis'. The Production Methods Committee began to look at the problem areas in production such as late hand-over. The Committee's general objective has been to lessen the production tensions which can build up for numerous reasons between (notably) the course team and Operations, by improving communication about hitches, and by stimulating the education of all concerned in course production to the problems arising.

It is a fair complaint to say that the schedules are seen as oppressive and that some ill feeling may be directed into the system because of this. Every effort should be made to make the path smoother. There are similar (but not as intensive) pressures at conventional universities.

I can understand therefore that academics get emotional about the pressure of work, and that they may prefer to convert frustration into anger, despair etc at mechanisms outside the CT. I don't feel that despair is widely spread in the OU, or that ideals have failed. The Report exaggerates in this respect. We are increasingly taking into the OU the less well equipped student and OU course offering is increasing.

The Report has been a little too sophisticated in some of its analysis. There are good reasons, for example, why some teaching staff work away from campus - they can get more done!

I'm not surprised that some people feel a need for self-preservation in the OU course team! The academic world is a jungle and the OU is probably one of the worse examples, as other pressures come to bear than simply publishing research and keeping on reasonably good terms with ones' (traditionally) despotic head of discipline. The Production Methods Committee would like to initiate staff training to make people more aware of the problems of working in groups, the course team's part of a production line and must keep to a schedule. One may regret in an academic institution having to work like this, production by ultimatum, but there is a printer waiting at the end of the line who also has a deadline. We are a factory with customers waiting to receive a product on a particular date.

The Report, significantly, does not recognise the complexity of managing 17 or 18 courses in production at once. The Report ignores the larger problem of how to manage an academic institution with traditionally academic staff so that it works in a quite untraditional way.

Interview 4

The report is daring to use such emotional terms. I hope this does not encourage suppression since we need some of the changes indicated, especially to experiment with other ways of doing things better. In particular we need to look at the viability of the course team as a way of working now. The CT way of producing courses was meant as an experiment which never became questioned because people worked so hard and it seemed easier to continue with some established procedures. Unfortunately, resistance to question, to experiment or to change has resulted in a stereotyped product and way of working, in committees as as CTs, which increasingly mal-adapts i.e. stifles creativity and leads to depression.

I think it is totally correct that the situation leads to a course being produced by a small residue of the course team. The experience of criticism of drafts is one of attack on a person's worth. Course team break down into autonomous subject groups who's decisions are sacrosanct. When units are well written they may present a strong point of view but not necessarily in equal proportion. This requires an independence of mind but openness too. Some CTs provide a more pastoral climate than others but this is often a result of an individual chairman. It is difficult to see how the structure could do more but the university acts as though it was not interested - not even when the products are affected.

There is a feeling of great distancing in the university - a lack of personal interaction and it is not due to not living in Milton Keynes. Even those that live there are isolated - they want to get on with their own work. When they come into the OU they want to get everything done as quickly as possible and get out again.

Heartlessness is really endemic in academic life anywhere. The commercial stresses of the OU just brings this more to the surface. There is a tension between wanting to write good teaching material and being approved of by peers. A fear of being too simplistic is real enough if you want to get promoted feel as frustrated.

It has more to do with the failure to plan and use time well and the institution failing to adapt procedures to situations. A person may become an expert at making programmes but he may find himself not doing so for 2-3 years because of the long time scale of course production.

External examiners are not used properly and fear of them also results in writing that is too difficult for an increasing proportion of students. We ought to look at the relation between drop-out and A-levels, for example.

Some people may still have an idealized vision but the university largely caters for people who have a successful experience of education. Many units are really written for them.

Contributing to this problem is the undue emphasis on the personal research ambitions of staff and the desire for PhD students. The power of discipline groups in the Faculties has tended to suffocate experimentation as well as minor academic areas. For a person on the fringe, the experience is one of always being called into a team to produce something to specification - never to initiate anything.

Years can slip away without doing anything - although this may be less true for younger staff. One takes some study leave and then there is not enough time to start anything this year so the time is absorbed in passively attending meetings. It was recently calculated that a 12 month full-time commitment to a CT really meant only 5 months - before committee work was deducted.

The Report may over emphasize the dependent role of being a student. Sometimes a CT member will not care if another knows more. A lot of learning does go on between CT members. But is it true that people have to keep tight boundaries around themselves.

There is a real feeling of frustration working in the OU. One is often left to pick up work left by team members rushing off on study leave, consultancy work or another course team. Few people other than the CTC know enough about what is going on to step in when problems crop up. Some deans are better at this than others.

Alexandra Palace provides more of a work place where people come every day and get on with their work and meet socially as well. In MK you only meet those under 30 in the bars. They are usually spared the trauma of working on CTs and carry on a semi-student life.

We suffer from not having regular vacations or times when people must be here. At least in an ordinary university you come together for term time. There is a feeling of leaving together and returning together. In MK you often end up working alone at the times you most need the support of colleagues.

The temptation is to do the minimum on units, get out where you can have more regular contact or reward - except for the closely knit discipline groups who veto anything new or which threatens to take time or resources away.

In 1971 we were all able to spend five days/week together producing a course in a short time, unhampered by a complicated system. It began to collapse after that with the CTC assuming most decision making and teams fragmenting. It was predicted by one observer that "after the first year we would start sitting on a compost heap of decaying course teams - eating away at the health of the institution."

Very few CTs work in the classic way except where made up by a group of young staff or committed old staff who have used their study leave. We might be better off without CTs - they consume so much time for people just sitting around. We ought to try other ways of producing courses. We should also consider that 90% of the use of OU materials are by other than our own students.

We ought to improve our link with the outside, and mediate it through the part-time tutors. They are rarely brought into CT activities except to advise on exams.

There has been an under commitment to IET. Their staff have not kept up with the growth of courses.

The early spirit of experiment has dried out and any attempts now are met by tremendous barriers.

There is no machinery in the university for solving personal crises which arise out of the stress of working in the OU.

Interview 5

I think the report has the broad picture right. But I don't know about the psychoanalytic concepts like unconscious. I'm agnostic about that and find I don't need such words.

I knew within one week of joining the OU that it was a very unhappy place with some people behaving in very odd ways. There is a general discontent and low morale and doubt about self worth. People are unable to learn from colleagues, to accept criticism without suffering a loss of face in the hierarchy. It is a shock to people when you tell them you want their criticisms.

The traditional myth of independence is irrational and immoral. People must be dependent. Its nearly a schizophrenic situation - half from an 18th century idea of independence and the other half from a modern world of a highly systematized basis for collective activity. A few capable clever people hold it together in the OU and if they should leave the whole thing would collapse. The notion of academic freedom is endemic in universities. Academics believe they have a scared mission from the universe to add to knowledge - that they are alone and not in discussion about it, that they have to protect their knowledge. Popper showed the nonsense of that.

The experience of working on CTs is an unhappy demoralizing experience where people become incapacitated for doing themselves justice. The OU academics are subjects for compassion. Most of them seem unhappy and dislodged. The number of balanced individuals is unhappily small and their collective behaviour extremely odd.

The OU needs a big human being as a VC who provides an example of what to believe in. People need leaders but another academic at its head will not give the OU what it needs. Unfortunately the power of the academics will result in the appointment of an academic.

It is queer contradiction that the OU product is creative but often the situation in which it is produced is not.

The only novelty of the OU is in its method of delivering a very conventional form of academic education. It has had no impact on changing the aims of higher education which are fixed on technological efficiency. This is particularly wrong for people at a distance - to mass a greater amount of knowledge without application to how to live life in a fulfilling and moral way. Much of traditional education is useless to developing a scientific approach - the belief that the mind is a muscle strengthened by exercise neglects the higher things. When students are shown how to attack useless knowledge that will be a true intellectual training.

Interview 6

I would have been less kind than the consultants if I was writing from a psychoanalytic perspective. Stronger statements are needed and some need to be corrected.

Academics create the destructive environment themselves as part of the academic game. There is too much pursuit of knowledge that one is interested in without sufficient responsibility for the institution and what it needs. Academics are very egocentric and destructive to each other.

Unfortunately people are thrown together in CTs without being given the necessary skills to help them. IET has failed to put together a 'tool kit' to help people to the job. People do act as though they cannot learn from each other. To take criticism so personally in the outside world would quickly put them out of a job.

One of the most neglected aspects of CT production is the maintenance stage. This name should be changed and the teaching part looked at as fully as important as the production. Staff tutors should be given far more authority for strengthening the link between production - teaching and the centre-periphery.

It is nonsense to talk about CTs - they are so different. One ought first to do a typology of CTs and study each type.

Failed ideals is a different notion. Who's ideals are we talking about and how have they failed? The assumption that there was a shared vision in the beginning. Individuals don't really compete for scarce resources. They've opted out.

IET staff don't wish to work together any more than academics do. I would say it is threatening to people and they do not wish to be threatened. Rather than despair, I find that all grossly overstated and emotionally self indulgent.

Most people find the OU a challenging creative and rewarding environment. Those who have left wish they were back.

Another metaphor for the CT is putting a child out for adoption immediately after it's born. A team ought to raise its 'child' as well as give birth to it.

Overall I would say that the Report is a correct statement as far as it goes, that there are some incorrect statements should not distract from the correct ones. We should look into these problems further with a full scale project.

Interview 7

The report has put some useful things on the agenda which we need to talk about. It takes the personal needs of people seriously and it needed to be done first, before further research into the problems. Although the OU is successful in more conventional ways than one thinks, the cost to individuals is important.

The Report is preoccupied with mutual criticism in CTs. This is not an issue, it is a normal situation for academics and in the OU we have assimilated the unique institutional aspects of this. In a conventional university anxiety is general and the academics less protected from criticism - ratings by students of lectures, for example.

The role of critic and colleague is usually more divided than in the OU, which must confuse boundaries. Our problem (and perhaps a result of closeness) is that most of the criticism here is too gentle. People find mutual criticism damaging sometimes - especially when not empirically based. But mostly the experience of CTs is gentle not damaging. It is institutionalized in a form easy to take.

The Report gives the impression that it was taken only from the drop-outs from CTs and the original nucleus which writes the course was neglected. It also seems based on presuppositions. There must have been an influence from the Tavistock association which clues people in - they expected to only talk about problems.

The reality of the CT is extremely positive, creative and one is usually more productive in the supportive environment. The social reality of the CT is not sufficiently emphasised - psychopathology, although disclaimed, is over emphasised.

The CT does not exist is a vacuum, strains are created from outside as well as inside. The internal dynamics are concerned with power, control over, constant argument for a position - all colour the CT experience. You need to do a typology of management of CTs and relate it to anxiety - which is not necessarily a bad thing.

There is always tension for a CTC - the rest of the team is not in the same position. The CTC is formally responsible and he is lost if he has to use what little authority he has. He is very vulnerable and late units are only one of many ways of making his life difficult. He is dependent on the good will of the CT. The possibility of total sabotage is enormous.

CTs fail because of the lack of criticism - making explicit the grounds of disappointment is never risked.

You need to look at pedagogy, ideology, power, discipline which all coalesce and develop into risk, pulling out, rivalry and lack of trust.

Controversy is too big a worry to get into and the result is a shipshod course. To pursue the conflict will come home to roost at the end. So people pull their punches.

It is important to distinguish between the peripheral CT and its centre - also the stages in the life of a CT. Early and late entering peripheral members usually have a jaundiced view. They use their eventual dropping out as a rationalisation for doing other things - which they intended all along. To justify doing their own thing they use a negative view of the CT and their inability to work.

You need to weigh these views separately from the core team who feel a large degree of control and large investment in the CT. To take peripheral members views at face value distorts reality - you get a 'turned-off' version of the course.

The process in CT development is one of negotiation and flirtation with the latter predominant.

Withdrawal is not necessarily undesirable but how big is it? Is it too large? It is very seductive going into a CT, flattering to be asked to write a unit. For some it is safer to write units and they find it difficult to begin publishing again where they are exposed to a far more critical audience without the protection of a course team. It is true that the CT can compromise your product.

The university and Faculties do not care about individuals who get into trouble in CTs. Support will depend on the personal interest of the CTC and he usually only wants to get the course out as successfully as possible - even if individuals have to be sacrificed.

Although academics in other universities can be terribly isolated we are isolated from students.

The disillusionment in the OU is never publically debated. The problems of political and ideological conflict in CTs needs to be openly addressed. People don't fight politics as they should as it might be too damaging.

IET might provide continued initiative in this rather than in the area of educational technology of doubtful quality or usefulness.

The problems of a course team are the price of working collectively in a quite loose structure.

People in positions of management where there is low hierarchy are reluctant to do much either. It might be too damaging. They rarely step in to deal with a problem when it develops, only after the ship is sinking. It is management by crisis. Deans back off from courses heading for disaster. There is insufficient personal interest on the part of management. Deans are very culpable.

So many things can get out of control in a CT in such a complex system. Communication is difficult especially given the time it takes to get things done. When things go right they are not interfered with.

Interview 8

The Report, in my experience makes sense. My main worry is that without a background in psychoanalytic theory, the Report will be misunderstood especially ideas like "institutional depression". The popular use of depression is different from the clinical use and the relation between individual and group depression complex. Something needs to be said about how the people were chosen for interviews - is it a broad sample. I would like to see a Report to look at alternative models which could apply to the OU - as well as the Tavi Kleinian model.

As I looked back over my experiences in CTs and as a CTC, I felt the Report had many truths. You do get dumping of depression especially to new staff and researchers. There is also dissatisfaction with the "instrumental" way which the University relates to people.

The Report is not directly on line of some central developments or description of groups. All interaction involves dependence and depression and this fitted into some university problem areas which we identify as instrumental.

Splitting into CT work and research is also encouraged by deans who encourage CT work which uses all your time and then wonder why you don't do research - all in the same conversation!

Anyone who has been here from the beginning knows that there is an increasingly large group withdrawing from involvement in the OU.

Institutional depression is not just a collective of depression in individuals. It's more abstract than that. For example, one way of understanding it is to see the OU students as a source of supply or nourishment (like a mother). But the institution has realized that the student body is not what it thought and is not giving what was wanted. Failed ideals could be an expression of turning away in a depressed withdrawn way. Institutional depression feeds into staff.

There have been several attempts to get staff tutors to say what students feelings are and what they wanted. It was hard to get the tutors to say anything at all. Perhaps this is the counsellors job but combining counsellors and tutors jobs has rather lost the former. There is a splitting off of feedback. We are not in continual contact with students.

Students think the regional office is the first place to go but they find people there who see themselves primarily as administrators and everyone sees Walton Hall as a vast computer. Only a select sample of students get through to the CT. They are pathetically grateful when we can help them because by this time they have tried so many places without satisfaction.

From the original staff you get a sense of an 'elder statesman' aspect - "it was not like this in the old days" on CTs. There is a disproportionate number of recent appointments. We lack (as a father) senior people who give a lead - especially in dealing with the system.

In the past most procedures were straight forward. But with the new committee structure one is faced continually by negatives - you can't have that. This result after the trouble of applications, argument etc, gives a feeling of contraction or "running down" rather than expansion.

The aspect of the OU which, according to the rhetoric, is of a novel experiment is being pared back. We are in danger of becoming a correspondence college rather than a place which experiments with the products and process in light of their effects.

All the time senior staff are saying the OU has lost something, it is not innovative any more. People become jaundiced and the next generation is never as good as one's own.

The competition for limited resources produced a feeling in CTs of fighting to do what the OU ought to want you to do.

Somehow the OU is fighting its own creative units.

The proliferation of the committee approach is a result of a growth in size. We can't just phone up a PVC for a decision. Problems become frozen in committees.

We should have developed a better executive system the committee structure was a traditional response to the production log jam of 73/74. Course resource first started to proliferate then.

Interview 9

I found if difficult to understand. My initial feeling was one of annoyance. A lot of statements I disagree with. It assumes a relatively simplistic idealized vision of higher education widely available. It assumes the OU is to help consolidate careers and give a second chance and therefore people are turned off. The number of teachers has dropped from 27% to 15% and housewifes have always made up the largest group. I don't think the courses are for those making careers, at least not in the Arts.

My own experience of CTs in the Arts Faculty is that members are not physically withdrawn and forced to come together in the CT. Academics are really not independent. Even in a conventional university they often share courses between two and also in writing articles.

The lack of students here does not make a tremendous difference. Central academics can and do get experience of what OU students are like. They have a tremendous motivation to learn compared to students in conventional universities. Many of them have to look after families and pay all the OU costs. Staff in summer school get feedback in a conventional way.

Developmental testing also provides feedback from tutors and students.

I do think there is a malaise in the university. People assume it has a cause since they can think back to a golden age ten years ago. But it is the same in other universities and is related to the hammering higher education has received in general - staff cannot get promoted, the financial thing. The great days of the 60's are over.

It is not fair to say there is a great gulf between the centre and the regions although a gulf is developing recently. Less regional people came into the centre because of financial restrictions.

Many staff have no experience of tertiary education other than the OU. They may have a feeling of being locked away in a box with the future stretching ahead with no certainties. This might help give a feeling of a small cog in a great machine. My first job was in a department of twenty people - only 20 cogs. It was not so amorphous as here and more intelligible. One has to 'learn' the OU systems and each of us needs our place in the sun as well.

The OU seemed simple in 72. Its more complex now.

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There does not seem any direction to IET. SRD does seem split off into 'number crunching' with a war between the rest of IET.

The report may prod us with things to think about even though the consultant may have misunderstood some things due to the extreme complexity of the OU. There is a history of outsiders producing reports about the OU which are filed away. They have totally failed to grasp the system and have never had a large circulation.

If the Tavi consultants get back comments will they be annoyed? Will they change their opinion or will they ask more specific questions about the operation?

Interview 10

What is the value of this psychoanalytic approach? It does provide certain truths about the nature of experience. An article of faith in the OU is that the CT is a good thing - a better method to deploy for teaching than face-to-face tuition.

There ought to be an enquiry into the CT method. Perhaps another way would be less difficult and more effective without abandoning its collective nature.

The joint working up of ideas was and is attractive - it did sustain the individual. But having your unit criticised can be a bloody experience, especially with inadequate management of the CT.

There is a sense of elaborate games with tremendous variability in individual sensitivity. There must be some psychological damage with differing idea of what a unit should be - arriving at a shared common view.

People are more depressed at the complexity of it all, they lack management skills, long term goals get fuzzy. So people are withdrawn. There is not too much discussion of pedagogy.

There is crisis management because it takes too long to do something. We don't anticipate but avoid problems. For example, with one new course a lot of time was invested in planning developmental testing, summer school and their uncertainty in the committee was damaging.

In a well managed CT there is a tolerance of criticism and goals are clearer. The problem is how to establish closeness and knowledge of each other - even when unhappy.

Post experience is a very different situation.

The university is a generator of anxiety. There is no use in asking for a resolution of its cause. Successful achievement of course production is a high hurdle which only massive devolution into small spending units would help.

The concept of institutional depression is partially useful. There is more opportunity for individuals to withdraw. It is more difficult in face to face teaching.

CTC are glad to devolve responsibility and split off work. Blurring of boundaries helps defence.

There is a high degree of interdependence in a CT. They never stop tackling problems. Time schedules are not punitive.

There may be a loss of goals, generally, a failed vision. Initially, there was a difference between us and the rest, but few shared any specific ideal. We are all learning how to be disillusioned. Increased equality has failed too.

But the OU is not generally a punishing environment. People punish themselves. There is a collective guilt rather than individual shame.

Interview 11

It is a fascinating document. I do not pretend to understand it all. I am struck by the analysis with my own experience but also by an absence of what the consultants would propose to do.

Proposing that we improve management by CTs is like asking people who are victims of the environment to drag themselves out and others with them - it sounds impossible.

We should see management of CTs as a domestic issue. Perhaps seminars to develop ideas with CTC of how a CT should work would help. The Production Methods Committee has started to do this.

The Report makes me ask what could be my role - is there something deeper one could do about the environment of a CT, a discipline or a Faculty?

It is very difficult to see how anything could be changed without affecting the fundamental basis of the establishment. It is very worrying that problems between CTs and other groups may mirror a larger problem of groups here.

Another limit is that one cannot down grade oneself to non-involvement.

It may be quite easy for some of us to dismiss the Report but it does identify a few truths which ought to be looked at.

My impression is that this is not a joyless place. Deadlines are experienced as punitive. The Production Methods Committee identified ten reasons for late units. Very few people are consistently on time - even the most punctual. Even given a time scale of two years, people are still unable to plan their time so units are not late. Then they feel guilty and all other things follow that - the punitive experience and effects on creativity.

Its idea of protecting good feelings from erosion by isolation is very true although it depends on the individual involved. There is too much of it for the good of the university.

Some Faculties get up tight when it suggested that they bring in outside consultants - based on past bad experience. They suggest that they know it all. But when outside people join the faculty then they automatically do know it all.

Perhaps because we pioneered so much in the past, if anything, we are now chary of any experimental approach. We are not keeping up with others now, they are creeping up on us. We are not as far in front now as we thought. Perhaps we are not paying enough attention to new development outside.

Relations with Continuing Education (CE) mirror how the Tavistock Report sees structure for CTs. Faculties view anything not in the undergraduate profile as suspect - if CE have peculiar courses, they are for peculiar people. The sorts of limits suggested for CE would not be tolerated by a Faculty.

There is a problem with the whole maintenance area - the concept should be more one of presentation and active teaching.

A comparison of Arts and Sciences would be instructive. The humanities, especially the social sciences have a personal view, approaches different for each individual so that units have, in contrast to science, named authors. Criticism is necessarily more personal.

Criticism in science is more impersonal - one perhaps did not do their homework properly. To criticise a unit as not good teaching is to some extent personal.You would expect, therefore, to find less friction in science course teams. But there is evidence of similar psychological mechanisms in all course teams. Why are science units still late with feelings or guilt and all of its consequences around?

In reading this report for the first time I have really recognized that others may have the same problems.

Interview 12

You should look at different stages in course production since the experience will change considerably. There are particular problems in maintenance. Administrators are one of the problems for CTs since they are always requesting things to be done. It would also be desirable to describe the different kinds of course teams, for example the experience of members and the effects of low enrolment.

A very active maintenance team, although it is doing more for the teaching, causes more problems for administration. Each year we have to ask what is the assessment pattern, what else is changed, what information is required for briefing and training of part-time tutors, and there is no budget for CTs to meet to deal with maintenance tasks.

An administrator picks up the problems felt by academics and regional staff when we come into personal contact. They are surprised to find you are a real person after all those impersonal memos. Even more surprising is that you are not threatening. ~A lot of the power attributed to administration is imagined. One is loathe to exercise what little one has.

Interview 13

The Report is correct in so far as it goes although I could offer a more incisive model to explain how individuals and groups get stuck. It is largely difference in behaviour and loss of communication, people cannot perceive how to tell oneself a story about what's going on.

The idea of the unconscious - many will not be willing to hear what the actual basis of behaviour is. There will be some obstruction of awareness against any broadening of consciousness.

In situations where one is involved over a long term there is limiting of involvement - this is common to society.

Personally, I was glad of the presence of a consultant in the course team, to comment on group processes and help keep a balance. The course team did learn something although some of the things it expected to do was wishful thinking. A consultant or IET member might help protect a CT member against becoming the object of false exploration of what goes wrong.

Interview 14

The broad outline of the Report is correct but the perspective is too narrow to give a complete understanding. There are other equally or more important effects on course teams such as organisation, resources and the amount of study leave CT members will be taking.

Job satisfaction is an important area to look at further. How to measure it is quite a problem. I would expect this to be a very unhappy place from my understanding of organisational theory, but I cannot generalise to the extent to which this is true of the OU.

Interview 15 (Group discussion)

Thirteen staff - Regional Director (RD), Assistant Regional Director (ARD), Staff Tutors (ST), Assistant Tutors (AT), Senior Counsellors (SR) and Administrative Staff (AS) listened to a brief introduction to the Report. The discussion following was chaired by a staff tutor who gave his opinions first.

(ST) The Report appeared to be largely fantasy, not relevant to my experience of the OU. Distance from colleagues is no excuse for problems - there is always the telephone. There can be unhappy experiences in CTs but 'anger' is a more appropriate work than despair. The attribute of the writers of the report is reflected in the careless way they express themselves. For example "perseverate" has two meanings - one theological "to continue in a state of grace" the other medical "a repetition of plainly spoken words or imperfect speech". The Report is a warning about Freudian psychology and how it can go off the rails. It is nonsense and reflects the value of what goes on at the Tavistock. I don't care how people feel about their work. I do not need the concept of unconscious to understand what people are about. All I'm interested in is that they get their work done. I rather expected you to say that my rejection of the report was due to my repression of bad experiences into my unconscious. I am surprised you did not say that (reply - it would be very unscientific to say that the absence of something was proof against its existence. Evidence has to do with experience that refutes hypotheses).

(RD) The Report does not fit my experience of course teams. There was no despair and frustrations are self induced. One CT had problems because of bad management - they did not understand what was going on in the complex system. Complaints about time are irrelevant because CTs agree the schedule with Project Control. How can they turn around and then complain about it? CTC are selected on academic criteria when they ought to be selected on administrative ability. I do find it worrying that the Report is not based on the experience of just one CT but opinions about many of them.

(ST) I think the personal attacks on our IET colleague are a good example of what the report is talking about. I would be very interested to know what he is feeling now - about this hostile reception and facile criticism.

(ST) That academics attack each others work is common to all universities - it is a lonely life. Why are we being so defensive about the OU then? Taking the individual academic and putting him into a group blurs familiar boundaries, the group can also be extremely supportive. If there is anything to criticise it is that CT criticism is far too general and kind.

(AT) The idea of a vision needs to be made more explicit and related to how we can continue as an institution. We are already seeing no response to a change in the student population in continuing education and OU preparatory courses.

(SC) The lack of student feedback is surely a fundamental problem although it should be mediated by the part-time staff there is no procedure for doing this and we are even cutting down tutorial provision. It is an easy target. Why don't we cut down on other areas such as TV or meetings?

(ARD) What is the reality of the OU? Our reality is the student in the region and his problem. This is a much more unhappy place compared to the conventional university where I worked before, I'm concerned that the unhappiness is increasing. Unlike the academic who can go to a new CT we are faced with the same problems year after year, from which we cannot escape. Also the regional meeting have a much more rigid structure than CTs and are more difficult to work with or change. It was a dreary face of in our regional meeting this morning.

The staff tutor who denied the existence of an unconscious seems to make convenient use of it since I have to remind him year after year of certain less welcome tasks which he has repressed. The same deadline in the regions, the absolute repetition is a harder face or reality than you know at Walton Hall. The problem is with staff who cannot bring themselves to the sticking point and work becomes progressively delayed.

Interview 16

While he saw the report's diagnosis as substantially correct, he felt it was very disappointing on two grounds. Firstly, because it offered no suggestions for dealing with the problem it raised. Secondly, because its style was irritating.

"Rat catchers would have found rats;
Catholic priests would have found guilt;
Psychoanalysts were bound to find despair".

The diagnosis was predictable and the report was wrong to suggest that people didn't talk about these problems. He is surprised how conscious OU staff are of their institutional goals and how much they ignore the external world's judgement of the OU as a success. He would expect most staff to dismiss the report's findings as obvious, although he felt himself that it was helpful to have these things recorded in a report. They are important problems both for OU efficiency and individuals' happiness and the report described them very accurately. One point on which he thought they were wrong, was their stress on the effects of the lack of students. He felt that an anthropologist making this study would have found many well defined roles and labels in use among our staff. He also criticised the authors for not having done their homework on OU systems of production e.g. schedules, course components and staff recruitment practices. He would have preferred the report to consider how far students were affected by the staff's problem. They should have talked to students, gone to summer school, seen the Horizon film and received a complete mailing. He feels that the staff's problems are probably inevitable in group work in any institution, but can be reduced.

One reason why the report is so negative may be that it sees the OU as rigid and incapable of change. He was disappointed not to see evidence of the authors' work with other institutions.

He had some positive suggestions: we should run more events like the Production Methods Committee's workshops, getting staff talking together about problems, with an internal OU facilitator. We should make a systematic study of how course teams are structured and what roles are adopted by their members. We should try cut alternative forms of course teams and alternatives to teams. We should circulate ideas and run staff induction sessions of hints on how to write units and on how to comment on them, and warning anecdotes about common team problems. We should consider all suggestions, even the single one the report mentions and dismisses i.e. encouraging to staff to spend more time on campus.

He dislikes the jargon in the report e.g. reality, managing the interface, mirroring, underlying metaphor, role perspective. He'd have liked a clearer presentation of some points that look interesting but are thrown away now: the simplistic models of management we use now; mutually collusive processes; and IET's internal saboteurs. He finds the style a mixture of pretension and humility and very defensive.

He is nervous about IET being associated with this report. He would not want us to commission more work from its authors. He would like to see IET follow up his positive suggestions.

Interview 17

He'd read it twice. He felt it was largely true but that these problems occurred in all universities. New staff always feel unsure of themselves and believe others know more than they do; they always feel inferior and isolated. Tenure allows staff the security to snipe at each other. They are individuals, each in their own cocoons. At other universities most even have their own office and own students; many of our staff have the instincts inherited from these even more isolated posts. Staff can do their work alone, even at the OU, and are competing with each other to shine in CTs.

At the BBC things are very different. People are working harder and are more dependent on each other, they have more distinct jobs and could not do each others work. However, they are also less honest about each others' work (the Harling' syndrome). They find tremendous joy in their work, seeing their own product, they're enthusiastic, working there is fun.

The report is depressing reading, especially as he doesn't expect any action to be taken on it - the OU has no management to take action on such a diagnosis. He would love to see the report's authors' thoughts on the BBC!

Interview 18

Its broadly correct in its diagnosis, though he'd have expected them to find more differences between the views of "old hands" and "recent arrivals". New staff seem to have a distorted expectation of what they will be able to achieve, they don't realise how complex the system is hence got very worried when they discover its sophistication. These worries are expressed as aggression towards BBC staff when they find they can't do what they want.

He believes things have changed, in the first 3-4 years, course team meetings were more constructive. The "old-hands" are bigger people and more humble. But now they are tired and don't want to go through the whole process again of educating new staff to the rules of the game - the language of the OU, its production system and technology.

Many new staff find the pressure of time schedules a novel and difficult discipline (lectures are never finished products nor offered for peers' criticism). Broadcasting is also anxiety provoking in its novelty.

Thinking about solutions to these dilemmas, he first raised and then rejected the idea of a counselling service, as it would be hard to find appropriate staff for it and because the majority of staff couldn't bear to admit they needed help. New staff could be helped a little by having these problems raised (at CT ante-natal classes?) he suggested giving them a revised version of this report and then discussing it with them.

It would look to be an IET role, to raise questions and levels of self-awareness. However, IET has an increasingly bad reputation for working for its own self glory rather than for the OU's problems. We're not helped by some of our appointments (he specified but I won't), who can't communicate at all well. On this, role of IET, he is saying that the report is mistaken to hope for IET leadership.

He said the report made him think of one of his BBC colleagues, a clear picture of this man in a mid-life crisis, with a recent string of collapsed projects, suffering criticism from his colleagues, now withdrawing from work, threatening others and feeling threatened.

Interview 19

He feels the report wouldn't' t make sense to those without direct CT experience. The language of the report doesn' t help: "it ' s not written for the layman". It insists the reader struggles with Tavistock terms, it is not translated into our terms.

He also criticises it for being an exaggerated view: not everyone is late, not all drafts get slammed, not everyone is depressed. "Did we really start with the idea that we'd be radical all our lives ? Levelling out is inevitable".

We agreed that the E202 team could be seen as an example of a group which appeared to suffer quite a lot of internal social problems but whose materials are praised and whose members appear to have survived and maybe even enjoyed the stresses.

Interview 20

He found the TIHR report a pleasant surprise - he hadn't realised what sort of project it was when he had been interviewed. While the report was interesting and he would agree with quite a lot of it, he felt generally the TIHR's descriptions of the OU were overstated and often oversimplified.

He thinks the 'punitive' course team is not as universal as the report suggests - perhaps more likely with, say, a Social Science CT, than one from Arts, for example, because academics from different Faculties seem to have different temperaments and styles. He could immediately think of two CTs which had operated smoothly; one where a senior academic chairman made the main decisions and junior staff co-operated, another where several senior staff were enough of one mind to cooperate agreeably.

Much of the language used in the report was, he thought, too strong: Particularly 'destructive', 'punitive' and 'despair'. He was also dubious about using terms and concepts from (mostly Freudian) individual psychology to describe organisational phenomena. He was not sure how widespread disillusionment was at the OU, but where it was present he felt it had as much to do with an individual's disillusionment with his/her particular job ambitions as with anything more general. Nor should one ignore the intellectual (not to mention financial) difficulties involved in monitoring and remaking courses; its not enough to say that academics shun maintenance because of painful memories involved.

Some people may withdraw from the OU but others, particularly those who live nearby, have many of their friends here. He prefers being at a place that's trying new things and changing, and also benevolent equalitarian and informal in the way people work together.

A disadvantage of the 'original' and 'innovative' ethos of the OU is that academics feel the need to create something new even when existing methods or materials would be quite adequate. He suggested some of the course team members who complain about the constraints of the committees are merely seeking to excuse the fact that they are not as creative as they think they ought to be. There is a degree of isolation involved in working on a course team, but he takes this to be inevitable because in the end, writing comes down to one person doing it on his or her own.

The lack of students on campus might make teachers seek social contact more from course teams and committees, and thus give the latter more importance than they would otherwise have had.

Interview 21

The general impression it gave is of terrible failure - that CTs reduce staff to paranoia - I don't think that is true. However, there is no smoke without fire. None of us like criticism.

The OU is going through a stage of suffering what presently afflicts large institutions in knowing each other. In order to make disparate people work together, to dovetail, it has to have an organisation imposed upon the way people work. Although a CT may conflict with Operations, it is the CT which has planned the way of work. Frustration may be inappropriately vented on the CT context. All academics should have some experience of management to see the problems.

There are problems of communication. Managing effectively requires good communication. People cannot understand why they cannot do their own thing. There are good reasons for restrictions. One can look at this to see if it can be improved.

There is also a lack of trust, especially as CTs get larger. Then they get suspicious of others, for example are the people in the design studio putting down the hours actually worked? This is perhaps human nature and there may be no way to encourage trust - especially when people lose personal contact.

In principle I would envision a course which would help managers be more aware of the kinds of problems and how to tackle them. This should be required for CTC.

I could imagine a final session of a course in how to interact in a group with helpful hints on how to run the dynamics of a CT. For example, how an author became so loosely identified with a unit draft, he, like a mother, defending his creation. One way to do this is to write a thick draft which is less amendable to changes. Thus, a CTC should try to settle the issue of what should be included before the large draft.

Interview 22

Everyone is different here, some direct from other universities are not sure, others who have worked in universities and know what it is about still tend to get lost. One academic who had written good quality material was put on a CT and went to pieces within one week. Although there were problems before they were enlarged by the CT situation - unable to communicate, to ask the right people or questions. Women particularly find roles different in a CT.

People who have problems in CTs should be helped much earlier but everyone under pressure thinks they do not have time to spend on personal problems. Then people are put in the job and no one shows them how to do it or where to go if there are problems. We need to employ a welfare officer to deal with personal problems.

Lots of heads run away from personal problems and some have refused to admit in 3 or 4 situations where help was asked. I feel that the amount of personal problems have been increasing since 72 or 73 at about 70% each year. No one has taken an interest in this area until the Tavistock Report.

There are still areas one cannot get around. One staff member who had time off still sits in the common room alone.

Encounter groups do not help, they are not worried about how they may help people and encounter can be too sudden. People go to them to be listened to.

Interview 23

There is a need for better definition of individual roles and responsibility for little areas. One does not have to feel someone else is equally responsible or breathing down your neck. I don't feel people react too badly about criticism. One tends to take people at face value. The report seemed rather pessimistic. I'm not sure I agree with myths about OU set up or general air about depression and declining vision. How many people believed those ideals.

Maintenance has always been a problem although there are efforts to do something about less successful courses. But the freedom to act is limited to supplementary materials.

CT depression is often an event which follows writing when the units are not well received by students. A course can get a bad reputation and people become sorry.

The Walton Hall atmosphere is unnerving with the feeling of such a small cog in a big machine. There is no real clear picture of the whole process.

The work in Faculties is difficult - so remote and isolated it is hard to feel anyone is reading what you are writing. Not many academics go to study centres to see what's going on. Most contact is limited to summer school but few courses have them.

On a CT a staff tutor is almost free to decide the degree of involvement. There is no pressure into doing particular tasks. Staff tutors, unlike central academics, have different things to turn to if the CT is not a good experience.

One course team I know of was badly managed - people felt mutilated but the materials still come out looking good. One member became so alienated that he did not do much but since his research is valued by the Faculty he has not suffered much from the experience. One gains a bit of self respect as part of a successful course.

Interview 24

He agrees with 'disappointment' idea. When he came, he had very high expectations, having seen the product. Once here, nothing interdisciplinary or inter-faculty for him - and found that there is a trend within OU away from interdisciplinary teams. And too much working with one's own kind makes you go stale, get closed off.

But he was able to express it to the Faculty Secretary - a mini 'container'. He however hadn't realised the trend, saw it and agreed with it, was surprised at 'it' - hence wasn't really in sympathy with Mike and hence wasn't doing any 'containing' for Mike. Mike needs wide-ranging, off-beat stimuli.

CT environment: Yes, there are destructive things, sad feelings, but to feel them as punitive one has to be a bit over-sensitive. It's all really about how fast you recover and get the individual CT experience into perspective. It's only punitive if it marks you lastingly. It is absolutely true that, in the end, course material gets produced by a very small residue of the CT. But the reason is administrative. When the deadline comes up, the course unit is hardly ever ready. And if it is ready, there's only time for one or two people to make comments on it. This is a crucial point that the Tavistock report didn't even mention. It somehow turns out that it's the same residue for each unit - 'outsiders' develop who aren't well enough informed to have their comments really count. This simply wouldn't happen if course design were de-coupled from course production; in that case the major design, commenting, criticising process would happen on the whole course early with everyone in on it. Arbitrary production deadlines - and absurdly tight schedules - are the real culprit.

Essence: the GT tells Production Control 'OK we're ready'. That's how it should be.

As it is, the CT fragments under the pressure, the product is fragmented, and the individual people in the CT often misinterpret what went wrong as ostracism.

He doesn't agree fully with the 'fear-of-dependency' thing and hardly ever feels afraid or embarrassed to ask what somebody is talking about. But to ask for help? He can ask easily of an individual but definitely afraid to ask for help from a group e.g. a CT. He definitely doesn't agree that deadlines are necessarily experienced by individuals as as punishing, even though they can wreck a CT and sometimes the CT won't know what hit it. If you are told - 'No good, rewrite it and get it done in two weeks, you'll do the best you can for 2 weeks and the deadline saves you from being a perfectionist and beating yourself over the head.

But deadlines do definitely stop a CT from functioning as a team. A deadline imposed on a CT from outside gets respected. A deadline imposed from inside a team e.g. to leave time for everyone to comment on a unit, often gets ignored. (Indeed - if you get your unit in just on the external deadline, you have to listen to any criticism or do any rewriting or learn anything! All that happens is that the residue CT rewrites your unit.)

The business about despair, mid-life crisis, etc. - this applies to any organisation. This is just 'institutional man'. And he doesn't agree with the business about failed ideals, collective disillusionment. There are a number of people who feel like that, but it's not collective. Basically, you work for the institution. When the place is as big as the OU, the institutional ideals become less important. And the OUs stated ideal of making education more widely available is only one of many. He came mainly for a working environment in which many new ideas circulate freely and in which he could do interdisciplinary work. The TIHR is correct about collective disillusion, but wrong in thinking it's mainly from one, ideological, source. All the rest about despair, mid-life crisis, withdrawal, being a receptacle for depression - true, but true of any institution in his experience polytechnics, industry, you name it.

The idea of using students to dump your anxieties or to forestall these is very true. TIHR report caused a great self-examination on this point. But conversely, he could sometimes take in and hold a student's anxiety. Certainly, talking with colleagues about students and about role relationships with students is a common vehicle for becoming closer to colleagues in an ordinary teaching institution.

Also, in giving a lecture - you know when you've finished the job. There is no such clear completion in writing a unit for a CT. No one says, 'Right, very good.' The only absolver from a task here is a deadline.

He certainly agrees with the idea that we are creating a hampering environment for one another and hence, because of responses from others, for ourselves at the same time.

We do collude with one another to assure ourselves that we're doing a great job, and of course, we feel threatened when Faculty Board puts on pressure - we colluded to say that we are producing on our own initiative, doing a good job, while in fact we are really jumping when various authorities and deadline imposers say 'jump'.

There is less such collusion in interdisciplinary work - where it is permissible not to understand what someone else has said or to say, 'That's rubbish' but perhaps then such work breeds a fear of breaking the collusion. The standard response to 'Why aren't there more interdisciplinary/inter-faculty courses? is 'Terrible working environment, constant argument. Never can get anything done!' There is a need for collusion to get things done.

On the IET - why is the OU so unwilling to get out of its collusive situation and let the IET or anyone raise questions and initiate exploration? One possibility: the coupling between course design and course production leaves no time for exploration.

One of the saddest things: in all his discipline meetings, the biggest source of pleasure is always 'Well lads, we've resisted them well up to now, stick together and we'll be able to hold them off for another few months. Maybe we'll find a leader who can build us an empire.'

The THIR report is misconceived. It's all about depression and despair. It should be all about defensiveness. Defensiveness is what the collusive process is all about. Defensiveness is shutting down openness, interdisciplinary work and inter-faculty work in the OU. Everything now gets seen as threatening rather than interesting. What has caused all this defensiveness?

Surely what actually brought the first people here wasn't the ideological ideal of education for the masses, but rather the possibility of opening up education, crossing disciplinary barriers and producing courses from a broader view.

Interview 25

A problem: Only one CT came under any detailed scrutiny and the particular CT was highly atypical. There was a marked reluctance on Irene's part to initiate. Yes, she said it was deliberate policy - not to thrust forward, to wait until people came to her. But how to know what she could be come to for? Catch-22.

It would have been OK if the chairman had asked her to give a CT presentation of what she was on about. But there were too many other pressures. So she, as a professional, should then have taken an initiative to make it clear what she was there for. Accepted consultant role? What does this mean? Not clear. What did she regard as being the topic of this 'accepted consultant role'? Obviously she felt she'd been accepted in what she was trying to do - but it was not clear to the CT what she was trying to do. If she was the professional there, she should have made it her business to make it clear what she was on about.

The THIR seems rather defensive about is 'psychoanalytic' stand point, both in the report and in their meetings. The CT didn't actually feel anything against it at all, although the CT did joke against it at Irene. Certainly, (my colleague, 'B') can say with confidence that he didn't feel any antipathy toward it, but he did definitely joke at her about it. One time he introduced her to a visitor as the CT 'shrink' (more or less!) She didn't react at all well. But in talking with the CT 'B' was not at all aware of any defensive reaction towards having her around. Just mild interest.

CT's: OU systems may be meant to enable CTs but they're not very good at it. The system has actually been set up in a way which makes things go wrong. e.g. editors' and designers' errors can go straight to the printers without referral first back to the CT.

Also, there are conflicts: e.g. the CT wants a picture here, for teaching reasons, while the designer wants it there for stylistic reasons. Or the editor moves a line in proof and the printer then introduces a new, uncaught error in making the editor's non-essential change.

Clearly, at present editors and designers often have objectives which conflict with a CTs academic objectives.

OU context: There is an insidious negative atmosphere, self-perpetuating. New people just absorb it and pass it on, regardless of any actual problems there may or may not be in the structure of the system.

CT's: Yes, they do become destructive. But that must be the inevitable result of putting six opinionated academics together and expecting them to agree. There will be arguments, people will lose them. Even in a 'hard' discipline there is a wide scope for different ideas about operating methods, teaching strategies, even about the working concepts and certainly about notation. If you have people who are trying very actively to be mutually tolerant, you can get by.

There is a peculiar prevarication sometimes in a CT about criticising units. One instance: privately everyone agreed that a particular unit was terrible. In the CT meeting no one had the courage to criticise it ruthlessly - everyone knew the author would be very defensive.

One solution that works: gets the author to lead and co-ordinate the criticism himself. That puts him in the CT rather than facing the CT.

Competence: If you have a small enough CT, mistakes are acceptable - just a natural part of working and learning. In a larger group, they are an embarrassment leading to defensiveness.

If you know someone regards himself as competent, you can criticise his work easily. Larger groups tend to breed defensiveness - firstly because it's harder to know whether someone regards himself as competent, and secondly, because one feels he might see the group as attacking him 'many-against-one'.

To a colleague and friend in private, you can say "You made a mess of that!", and both laugh. Total non-defensiveness. Whereas you can't say that to him in public without it feeling to him like a personal attack, much less to someone who is not a friend.

Even though it should be possible in public to dissociate long term competence from the short-term mistakes everyone makes all the time, it's not clear how-this might be done.

What's the difference between an attack on a person's competence and an attack on the person? The former implies the latter. The TIHR report is not clear here.

What is an unconscious 'social process'? An observable process of which we are unaware? Or a deep-lying, psychoanalytic phenomenon which influences us profoundly and is not in itself susceptible to observation? What does the TIHR mean?

Division of a CT into sub-groups doesn't necessarily bring loss of authority. Sometimes a subgroup evolves which has all the responsibility and de facto most of the authority for getting the work done. Without such a subgroup, an author must sometimes submit his work for judgement to people whose judgement in that area he does not respect.

What is 'the pattern of existing management of CT 's' that doesn't provide a container for anxiety'? What does this mean?

Anxieties and disquiet about work certainly do exist. Their main source seems to be the opinion of colleagues, not of students. (Anyway, students tend not to opine: they respond to bad teaching by thinking the subject is intrinsically difficult or by thinking they themselves are not very competent - hardly ever by blaming the teacher as incompetent). Bad student grades or bad CURF returns don't cause nearly as much anxiety and disquiet to the teacher as does criticism from his fellows.

But how can one possibly explore anxiety and disquiet without taking the risk of receiving a worse hurt? Perhaps one can, if one is quite sure of one's own competence - but then the need isn't there. Catch-22.

Why do people have to attack one another's work to bolster the myth of independence'? Isn't it more likely that they are just practicing the idea of 'the best defence is a good offence'? Or does independence mean 'not needing anyone else for help or for information' - fear of showing ignorance? Fear of asking to learn from other people? But how can you expect to have all this all-embracing competence? It can't happen.

Felt isolation in writing at home alone: Maybe it occurs because in writing by oneself, one doesn't expect support from the group in doing the work. One expects only post-hoc judgement. But how else can a unit be produced? It needs a concerted effort by one mind to get out a product. Writing smaller teaching segments might help, but in our experience we don't know how to do the prior co-ordination required - assuming it is possible.

Deadlines: Yes, they are punishing, but they are also times of fruition. There is no conflict between these two ideas provided one can work hard enough and fast enough to meet the deadline. In this case the punishment is not in the deadline; it is in the work itself. CT meetings on Phase X, when the work is done, aren't necessarily punishing - they can be very exciting.

How bad is a memory that is 'so bad it has to be repressed in the unconscious'? Presumably this can't be commented on. If one has had such a memory, one doesn't know it. Is this psychoanalytic theory actually falsifiable? Looks like it may not be.

'Rationality and instrumentality in relations' are not a consequence of the 'OUs sophisticated technology'. Our CT didn't seem to suffer from such relationships. Within a discipline or within a good CT there are likely to be good personal and after-hours social relations.

'The unconscious cannot be acknowledged in the context of work'. What does this mean? How can unconscious group processes be acknowledged when we are unaware of them while they are happening?

Projection/introjection: this must really be all about blame. And when the blame comes back en masse, either you 'introject' it and get hurt and build a defensive wall, or else you already have a wall and the introjection doesn't happen. There may always be projection, but not necessarily introjection.

You could spend hours wondering what each paragraph in the report means. It is very unclear, ambiguous. 'No one can learn from anyone else unless they happen to belong to a strong friendship group that can contain their anxiety.' This is not understandable. In such a group, the anxiety doesn't arise in the first place. That is, in a strong friendship group, no one is afraid to ask to learn from another in the first place. There isn't any anxiety arising from this source, to be contained. Any anxiety in this kind of group must come from sources outside the group.

No metaphor 'underlies the OU and patterns its functioning'. All metaphors are ascribed by observers, in this case the THIR.

The OU of course is organised around the method of production organised as a mass-production system. This must be what TIHR means when they say 'technological metaphor', industrial metaphor', etc. Perhaps they mean that the OU treats course producers like car workers and that the OU misses the chance to treat them like Volvo workers rather than Leyland workers. But 'the OU' doesn't 'treat people'. The CT itself has enormous range as to how it organises itself to meet its externally imposed deadlines. Still, though, these deadlines in themselves can be hampering; they can prevent the CT from organising its work in the way it feels is best to do what it feels is the job required of it. But there isn't an 'OU management' as such that's to blame.

What about 'fictions and myths'? The authors criticise the OU for adopting myths like 'critical paths' as reality, yet waffle on themselves about 'we have found that the metaphor which patterns the OU processes...' etc. The whole report degenerates into psychoanalytic waffle. A gross failure of communication, highly inconsiderate of its audience.

Simplistic models of management? Employed but not enjoyed? What are they? The report doesn't say! What is the TIHR trying to say?

Interview 26

The report assumes there is only one kind of CT and that all CTs are involved with each other as teams. Some team members have very little effect on each other.

The next step for IET should be not to try to persuade the doubters that such problems exist, but to sensitize people further who are able to perceive them and to encourage these perceptive souls to take positive action to combat the problems.

Our search for positive ameliorating action might include looking at:

i) Alternative forms to course teams, e.g. the transformer model, all consultants, paired work;

ii) research on team teaching in schools

iii) research on micro-teaching, (which also involves public exposure of one's work);

iv) the transition phase in a team from think-tank to workshop;

v) group dynamics research;

vi) Leo Evans workshops on the conduct of academic meetings;

vii) the chairman's role as a sponsoring editor;

viii) occasions when authorship of a unit has voluntarily or forcibly changed hands;

ix) the non-producers and how they do it!

x) the role of the Human Resources Information Group of the committee;

xi) the predictive value of team or individuals' track records

xxi) how the need for the security of many files of papers can be met;

xiii) the apparent taboo on open team discussion of track records.

Following are four unsolicited written responses from OU academics

Response 1

I would like to express my whole hearted support for the main conclusion of this report. I understand that the course team which was the main subject of this study was not in Social Sciences. But what the report says is consistent with my own experience and my perceptions of what has been a common pattern in the Social Sciences Faculty over the past nine years.

The production course team of twenty or thirty academics dwindling to a single course co-ordinator becoming maintenance course team chairman a few years later is a typical history. Big personal productivity in terms of course units for a few years after joining the OU falling away to very low productivity after about five years appears to be another typical bit of history (which is of course empirically verifiable). Members of the Faculty are not open about whether they feel a sense of despair or not but such a sense of despair seems consistent with what a lot of members of the Faculty do. Our former Dean Michael Drake must for example have experienced quite a lot of despair to get to the stage where he refers to the course team as a kind of 'cancer'.

I would very much like to see the Tavistock work extended within the OU. There are two areas in particular which seem to me to deserve attention.

1. Academic freedom and the Course Team: Some of the problems described in the Tavistock report could be avoided or mitigated if a distinction could be preserved between the interpretations (i.e. to exercise his academic freedom), and the CTs responsibility to ensure that students have the material which will enable them to achieve the educational objectives of the course.

Why do course teams have such difficulty in making this distinction? Why has the issue of individual academic freedom never been aired within the OU? In Social Sciences there are plenty of examples of draft units being rejected by the course team and in many cases this bit of interaction can convincingly be interpreted as an infringement of individual academic freedom. The individual feels isolated or rejected or both.

The other half of the picture is evident in the character of some courses which are increasingly becoming bland and uncontroversial. They are not always uncontroversial because the CT-institution acts as a self section process for academics with views which are consistent with each other. So courses often have blind spots where a view or position has been dismissed simply by ignoring it. In the same way courses can be unbalanced overall and thereby fail to give students what should be available to them because CT members reinforce their own prejudices.

2. Relationship between the CT and the rest of the University. One component of the despair felt by many academics is what has appeared to be a growing mindlessness in the character as well as the content of the responses of the rest of the University to CTs. I would hypothesize that a major part of this mindlessness (or whatever politer or more aggressive term which might be used) is associated with the difference in the terms and conditions of services of academics and those of most other members of the University.

Academics are generally well paid, they have long salary scales, they very rarely get sacked even if they don't do any work. They have no fixed hours of work, some of them never seem to come to Walton Hall and those who do spend much of their time talking to colleagues or playing squash. The contrast between the work style of academics and that which is imposed on many other members of the University could hardly be greater. Yet as the Tavistock report mentions the other members of the University are all there to help academics achieve what they want to achieve through the Course Team.

Small wonder that other members of the University take defensive positions so that academics who are institutionalised as Gods gift to OU students don't much them about too much. I would wouldn't you?

I can't see any University body ever saying anything intelligent about this problem. But I can see that the Tavistock approach could well help make problems of this kind explicit, discussable and therefore resolvable.

Response 2

Thanks for letting me see this paper. For your information, I attach a copy of a paper by Ray Woolfe and myself concerning the negotiation of knowledge in the OU, since I think there are some proximate speculations between this paper and the TIHR paper.

The experience of being a Course Team member is an unusual one, as Ray and I have both personally experienced. Part of the experience not mentioned in the TIHR paper is the disillusionment that takes place, especially in relation to people who are formerly admired. In my own experience, a chap whose work I thought was IA1, OK, SUPER' turned out to be mediocre, shallow and bitchy. My image was shattered and one motive for joining the team was gone.

Another feature was the slowness of progress. It was as if the CT Chairman didn't want to play the role of Chairman, didn't want the team to be trapped by its own decisions, didn't want procedural arguments. A consequence of this was that decisions seemed to be forced upon us by persons, institutions external to the CT - i.e. publishing, print-shop, reprographics, consultants. This lead to individuals feeling 'powerless' both in terms of procedures and events.

These observations do not detract from my broad agreement with the TIHR paper, indeed they provide some further evidence.

Response 3

I am very sorry that I have not been able to attend the Tavistock during group discussions or other group meetings lately because they have invariably clashed with Monday course teams which at this stage I absolutely must attend. I have thought a good deal about the Tavistock document. In the end I simply send you my copy with pencil notes, some heart felt, some caustic, some probably irrelevant, warts and all. I don't have the time to put anything more sensible together at the moment. My most important reaction probably is that the paper is almost predictable given the Tavistock stance. I feel it doesn't look wide enough;and doesn't look at contrary cases. For example there are course teams which are co-operative and cheerful even though there are some certainly cases of withdrawal, loneliness, and starvation. I also wonder if some aspects of the problems they recognise so clearly could not simply be tackled by mundane methods such as more careful briefing and training of course team chairman, preparing arrangements between individuals in IET with complementary problems, management arrangements or more (outside IET Board) and less formal discussion of IET role as seen in the OU and what can be done about it. But I am not sure that a small group of individuals apparently devoted to one kind of framework of explanation (I am not sure that you are?) will be able to produce anything sufficiently block busting to shift some of these situations.

Response 4

Some reactions to the TIHR Report: The Open University

First let me say how glad I am that some interest is being shown in the institution which is at the core of the Open University's system, and which, while it all too frequently receives bland and self-congratulatory celebration, has failed, so far, to elicit any useful analysis of its nature, or of the circumstances for its efficiency or inefficiency. It seems remarkable to me that when we are faced with the very clear evidence that course teams vary in their success, the quality of courses, and their operational efficiency, that we continue to attribute these variations not to the dynamics of the course teams themselves, but to the psychopathology of members of the course team (or the course team chairman), or to the intransigence and obstructionism of the administration, publishing, operations and so on.

Clearly we need imaginative and insightful analysis of the way we work as groups within the Open University, and as a preliminary step in this direction I welcome this report. It is imaginative and intelligent. But I feel there are some qualifications and criticisms that can usefully be made. It is in this spirit of trying to initiate a debate about the nature and pathologies of course teams and of working in the Open University that these remarks are offered.

The TIHR report argues that people who have worked on course teams report their disappointment with the experience. The researchers argue that this disappointment is the result of the punitive nature of the course team experience. And that this follows from the criticism that course team members are required to suffer during their membership of the team. These criticisms give rise to anxieties, and these anxieties are not 'contained' or managed positively. The report then argues that in some way the course team is a 'mirror' of the larger OU (p.5), and that there is some connection between the anxiety generated by the course team experience of open criticism of members' units. and a more general underlying despair which pervades the University as a whole. One consequence of this despair - which is caused by such factors as the pruning of education, the 'mid-life crisis', the erosion of the university's radicalism, and the lack of dependent students - is a withdrawal, a compartmentalisation of individuals' lives. It seems to me that this analysis raises a number of problems.

How do you know? This an obvious, if rather unfair question, since the report inevitably condenses numerous discussions and interviews and the nature of the analysis presented, which is essentially qualitative rather than quantitative, makes head-counting difficult. Nevertheless, since this report by the TIHR claims to discover a situation which is amenable to, if not only describably in, the concepts of the TIHR, it is at least likely that the sceptic would suggest the report reveals as much about the conceptual categories or methodological assumptions of practising members of that institution as it does about the institution it claims to describe. Therefore it is of more than usual importance that we know such things as: How many course teams were covered by the research? How were respondents selected? Did they choose themselves? What questions/topics were covered in the interviews? How successful/happy were the Course Teams?

The report claims a general, university-wide significance. Now it is at least part of my experience, and, I think, of general knowledge, that course teams vary. It is quite possible that they may vary most with respect to the characteristics isolated by the report. If this is so, then it would seem important that the researchers include in their conversations representatives of as many course teams as possible - happy/unhappy, successful/unsuccessful. (I'm not claiming these dimensions are coincident). Are we wrong in maintaining that course teams vary in these respects? Is it really the case that the TIHR analysis applies to all course teams? If, as I suspect, it doesn't, then what happens in the 'deviant', anxiety-containing ones? This leads to a further question - what does this 'anxiety-containment' look like? What does it mean in practice? What does it mean in terms of management style. procedural arrangements, size, types of members?

I feel the report over-emphasizes the uniqueness of the OU and course teams. It is part of the every-day experience of academics that their work is open to criticism. All academics are used to playing the role of colleague/friend/supporter/patron, and critic/impartial judge/reviewer. Every time we write any thing new we know it will be publically reviewed and criticised. There's nothing new in the experience of being open to criticism. What is new about the OU is the fact that criticism is directed at an activity that is usually not open to criticism (teaching) by an audience which is not usually an academic's critical reference group - his immediate colleagues. But one mustn't over stretch these peculiarities: in many universities students' assessments of the lecturers' teaching are regularly published; and it is quite usual for academics to sit in judgement on their colleagues at time or promotion, applications for tenure, etc. In short, if exposure to criticism is a major source of disabling anxiety, most academics most of the time would be disabled (or withdrawn) by anxiety. There is no reason, of course, why the TIHR researchers should avoid this conclusion. But it does imply that it is not the course team system Itself or the OU that is the source of the problem.

Despite its insistence that the report, and the traditions which it exemplifies, is not concerned with people-as-patients, or with psycho-pathology, but with the working of the unconscious within the political framework of institutions (a laudable and fascinating aim) it seems to me that there is an over-emphasis on the individual level anxiety and despair, and a relative under-emphasis on the social structure of the course team. It is, for example my experience that different types of member of a course team get different things out of it - that to speak in general of all members having the same experience and the same reactions to that experience is to miss the important ways in which course teams start with, and develop quite clear types of members. I'm not here making a simple-minded plea for the uniqueness of the individual, merely suggesting that like all groups, course teams develop their distinctive heroes and villains, jesters, managers, scapegoats, and so on. Possibly these categories and others are a 'natural' response to the strains and exigencies of the experience. But they may also be ways of coping with some of the difficulties encountered.

Secondly, power and the hierarchical relations of the course team get no attention, and this to my mind is a pity. Much of what happens within course teams, and much that can go wrong, is the result of power relations, and in particular, the imposition of relatively clear but ultimately highly contingent and dependent authority relationships on people who are frequently formally equals, and who are possible resistant to, and unused to, operating in formally subordinate relationships. (This is not to deny that conventional academics, and to some degree OU academics, operate within a formal hierarchical scale of positions. It is to say that it is unusual for these relationships of formal authority to have anything to do with the content of teaching materials. Professors elsewhere do not usually interfere in the teaching of their staff).

At the OU however, one member of the course team has just such responsibility, and quite frequently, this person is of no more formal seniority than the other members. This undoubtedly creates difficulties for both sides. And these difficulties are compounded when, as is the case, the course team chairman, for all his formal responsibility and authority, is entirely dependent on the good-will and commitment of the members, many or some of whom may resent any behaviour which they identify as being authoritative, or managerial, ie. which reflects their subordination, and the chairman's commitment to deadlines etc. Some at least of the withdrawal of CT members described in the report may be seen as efforts to damage, possibly to sabotage a course which members see as not going their way, or which they feel will assist the career development of a disliked chairman, or rival.

Thirdly, the report sometimes seems to forget that course teams do not work in a vacuum. They exist, and must find ways of operating within a particular and idiosyncratic organisational context. Much of what happens within course teams - and surely much of the anxiety of course team members

- should be seen in the context of the fragmentation of work within the OU, and of the division of responsibilities, and of power relationships between departments. It is not surprising that the various departments and faculties which are involved in the production of a course sometimes learn to define each other as antithetical to each other's interests and goals. Nor is it surprising that in the inevitable conflicts each side defines itself as protecting the interests of the students against irresponsible academics, obstructive administrator, etc. But at the OU such conflicts possibly take on a particular significance because of (a) the rapid growth and subsequent bureacratization of the University, and (b) the fact that at least some of the academics are oriented (like professionals elsewhere) not only to their employing organisation but to the outside reference group of other academics. For them there is a world elsewhere, a world to which the embattled academic can, occasionally, retreat; a world which he can see himself having to protect against the incursions of administrator or publisher. It seems to me that relationships between course teams and their 'environment' have an organisational - indeed a professional - reality which cannot be described simply in terms of projection and introjection. And these relationships, very often, are concerned with questions of power, and control.

My own experience of a number of course teams suggests that if they may be, on the unconscious level, generators of uncontainable anxiety they are also, like other groups, excessively concerned with alleviating the anxiety of members. It is not unknown for a course to suffer in efficiency and academic quality, precisely because of an unwillingness to criticize directly and plainly, or to make explicit conflicts and disagreements about course structure or content, or to deal with a recalcitrant or dissident member. Indeed, in my experience, it is the course team's lack of willingness to acknowledge its differences and strains - concerning academic matters, course content, ideological differences, pedagogic positions, inter-personal disputes and lack of trust, careerism, and so on - which is a more important source of failure than the generalised generation of anxiety as a result of criticism. Incidentally, this raises another point - is it necessarily true that anxiety is a source of course team inefficiency? Clearly if course teams routinely generate such high levels of anxiety in their members that they withdraw, or fail to produce, or produce late, then anxiety and efficiency are incompatible. But a certain level of anxiety might be, I would think, a necessary precondition for a successful course team performance. Have most/all CTs been inefficient or unsuccessful?

Possibly the TIHR analysis of the reasons for course team members' 'withdrawal' is correct. But in my experience such 'withdrawal' from any one course team, or an inability to produce units etc. on time, is the result not of withdrawal from course teams, but from over commitment to more than one. It results not from lack of commitment, or from damaging experiences, but from over-enthusiasm. Possibly this is analogous to the way in which people who divorce and re-marry frequently insist that they believe in and value the institution of marriage.

I have grave doubts about the sections of the report starting on page 5. The connection posited between course teams and the larger world of the OU seems weak - that the course team 'mirrors' the OU in unspecified ways. The discussion of projection and introjection strikes me as vague. More seriously, the analysis under Some Psychic and Political Phenomena, raises two questions: firstly, how, then, are we to account for what strikes me as remarkable about the OU - at least the Walton Hall end - is the amount of energy people have. If these people are in despair, what would happen if they were enthusiastic? The problem is not withdrawal, but over commitment: too many courses with too much material, and too many broadcasts, etc. If there is a single malaise that is quite common in the faculties it's exhaustion, not despair. Surely the objective indices of courses, research, publication, committee work and so on fly in the face of the despair thesis? If not, how do we recognise despair and withdrawal in behavioural terms?

Secondly, the suggestion that social depression is widespread because of uniquely OU factors (disregarding such things as the cuts in education and the mid-career crisis which presumably are not specific to the OU and anyway are part of the realities we must face) such as the lack of fulfilment of the OU's original vision strikes me as a bit simple-minded. I'm not sure that everyone shared the vision as it's presented in the report. To the extent that people were/ are committed to the institution as an 'open' university with all that meals. I am not convinced they would accept that the University has failed to fulfil its promise. This is obviously a complicated matter, but I feel that the evident success of the University in so many ways, including, to some extent, the notion of success implicit in the report's conception of its original goal. Its success in gaining credibility, in producing high quality materials, in surviving, in doing better at attracting working class students than any of the conventional universities, in attracting world-wide interest, and so on, belies the report's rather sweeping attribution of generalised depression as a result of a generally agreed institutional failure.

The latter part of the report makes so much of the apparent 'withdrawal' of OU academics, and attributes this to their social despair, and their course team based anxieties. Obviously I have some doubts about the imputed origins of the withdrawal. But a further question is: what evidence is there for the withdrawal itself? And how do we know that creativity is being diminished, as claimed by the report? The report begins with a remark that '...the products of CTs are often very innovative, stimulating and exciting.' Is there any evidence that this assessment is less true now that in earlier years?

However, despite my reservations about the imputed origins of the claimed withdrawal, it seems to me that some such withdrawal may be taking place to some degree, but not for the reasons given. What is happening is a deliberate and encouraged policy (at least within the Social Sciences Faculty) of academics putting more effort into their own publications and research, and less into courses. This move partly reflects the fact that the University is near its self-imposed quota of courses, partly it reflects individuals' realisation that personal career development as academics, requires achievements in the conventional areas of academic activity - books, research, papers, articles - as well as OU course materials. I feel that this shift of emphasis, and individuals' varying willingness to wean themselves from OU courses and OU publications may indeed both reflect and occasion considerable anxiety, but that's another story. It seems to me that far from withdrawing from the CT because of anxiety some people are in fact unable to withdraw and commit themselves to more conventional forms of publication precisely because of the ultimately more public, more basic, and more damaging criticism to which this move would expose them. In many ways it's safer and easier to publish through the OU than it is through conventional systems.

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